

SECTION 11. EUROPEAN DIMENSIONS OF PHILOLOGICAL EDUCATION

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SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES NEEDED FOR EU AND EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT INTERPRETERS

НАВИЧКИ ТА КОМПЕТЕНЦІЇ, НЕОБХІДНІ ДЛЯ ПЕРЕКЛАДАЧІВ ЄС ТА ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКОГО ПАРЛАМЕНТУ¹

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Working as a conference interpreter in EU institutions demands a highly specialized skill set and rigorous qualifications. The European Parliament and European Commission interpreting services require candidates who not only have excellent language abilities but also can perform under intense conditions with technical and domain expertise. Key skills and competencies include:

Simultaneous Interpreting Proficiency, which is arguably the cornerstone skill for EU interpreters. In bodies like the European Parliament, debates are interpreted *simultaneously* into 24 languages in real time [3]. Interpreters

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must listen and speak almost concurrently, maintaining accuracy and coherence. Mastery of simultaneous interpreting technique – including split-second lag (*décalage*) management, active listening, and real-time reformulation – is essential. EU accreditation tests explicitly examine a candidate's simultaneous interpreting in each required language combination (10–12 minute speeches) [1]. Successful interpreters demonstrate the ability to convey not just words but the full meaning, tone, and intent of a speech instantly into the target language, without omissions or undue pauses.

Consecutive Interpreting and Note-Taking is implied through the fact that while simultaneous is the dominant mode in EU meetings, consecutive interpreting (with note-taking) remains important for certain settings (e.g., smaller meetings, press conferences, or when technical issues arise). Interpreters need to render speeches of several minutes from memory, aided by a structured note-taking system. The EU's freelance interpreter test requires interpreting ~6-minute consecutive speeches as part of the exam [1]. Therefore, trainees must develop note-taking techniques, memory skills, and public speaking poise to deliver polished consecutive interpretations. This includes using symbols and abbreviations efficiently, and restructuring speeches logically in the target language.

Multilingual Language Proficiency covers the fact that EU interpreters work in a multilingual environment, often handling multiple source languages. A minimum language combination for accreditation is typically an excellent command of one's mother tongue (Language "A") and at least *two* other EU languages (Languages "C" as passive languages, or one "B" active language and one "C") [2]. For instance, a Ukrainian interpreter might work from English and French (Cs) into Ukrainian (A). The ability to understand a variety of accents, dialects, and speaking styles in each source language is critical. Additionally, many EU interpreters develop more languages over their career (so-called *language enhancement*), given the EU's evolving needs.

Fluency and comprehension across this combination is non-negotiable: interpreters must catch nuance and technical terms in any speech, whether it's delivered in rapid French or complex German. This requires continuous vocabulary expansion and cultural knowledge of each country.

A deep familiarity with EU terminology, legal concepts, and political discourse is required. Speeches in the European Parliament or Commission often refer to EU legislation, institutions, programs, and political terms. Interpreters must know the correct translations for things like EU directives, regulatory bodies, and political groups. Training programs often include courses on EU structure and law [4] to build this knowledge. Likewise, interpreters benefit from a strong grasp of international affairs, economics,

and current events, as any topic can arise in debate. An interpreter should be, in effect, a generalist specialist – comfortable with subjects ranging from climate policy to agricultural regulations. Research skills and preparation are part of the job: EU interpreters routinely study briefing materials and terminology lists before meetings. The ability to quickly adapt to new topics and acquire terminology (often in multiple languages) is a valued skill.

Modern interpreting in EU settings increasingly involves technology. Interpreters must be adept with digital interpretation consoles, headsets, and microphones in various conference venues (or even remote platforms for videoconferences). The pandemic accelerated the use of remote interpreting, so interpreters need to manage without ideal acoustic conditions and deal with videoconference tools.

In terms of formal qualifications, to work for EU institutions interpreters must be accredited or selected through competition. The EU *freelance accreditation test* requires either a specialized degree in conference interpreting or equivalent experience as a prerequisite [1]. Candidates must then pass a two-part exam (simultaneous and consecutive interpreting in required languages) assessed by an inter-institutional jury [1]. Only those who meet the high-performance standards are added to the joint list of Accredited Conference Interpreting Agents [1]. For permanent staff positions (e.g., “conference interpreter” roles at the European Commission or Parliament), interpreters usually undergo a competitive examination via EPSO, which similarly tests their interpreting in all languages, often including a situational interview or assessment center. Certification in this context is essentially the EU’s own accreditation; there is no generic license, but graduation from a top interpreting program significantly boosts one’s chances. Many EU interpreters hold a Master’s in Conference Interpreting (often from an EMCI member school), which the institutions consider as meeting education requirements [1]. In addition, some interpreters pursue membership in professional bodies like AIIC, subscribing to their code of ethics – though AIIC membership is not required by the EU, adherence to professional ethics and confidentiality is implicitly expected.

Beyond the technical skills, EU interpreters need a suite of soft skills. Quick decision-making and composure under pressure are vital – parliamentary debates can be heated and fast-paced, requiring mental agility. Communication and voice skills matter as well: interpreters train to modulate their voice, maintain clear enunciation, and convey tone appropriately (for example, matching the formality or emotional tone of the speaker). Teamwork is another often overlooked skill – in EU booths, interpreters work in teams, supporting each other with notes or taking over if a colleague struggles. Cultural sensitivity and understanding are crucial in rendering idioms or culturally specific references accurately for an

international audience. Finally, continuous learning is a competency: EU interpreters are always expanding terminology and often learning new languages or updating their knowledge as the EU adds members or policy areas. The best interpreters demonstrate intellectual curiosity and adaptability, which allows them to serve the multilingual needs of the Union effectively.

In summary, preparing to work at the EU or EP level means achieving excellence in simultaneous and consecutive interpreting, mastering multiple languages and specialized jargon, and meeting formal accreditation standards. Ukrainian programs must therefore aim to cultivate all these competencies in students – a high bar that requires intensive training, exposure to EU subject matter, and validation through exams or certification aligned with EU expectations.

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