



REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA
MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

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Official translations of *acquis communautaire*

Dear Oleksandr Kushnir,

Thank you for getting in touch with us. We would gladly share our experience.

Preparations for the translation of all EU law into Estonian necessary for joining the EU and the translation of Estonian Acts into English began already in 1995, when the Estonian Legal Translation Centre was established as an agency administered by the Government Office. The idea of the centre was initiated by Estonians from Canada, led by Peeter Mehisto. Many foreign countries, such as Canada, Finland, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, France, and organisations, including the European Union's PHARE programme and the Open Estonia Foundation, contributed to the establishment of the Centre.

At first, the Centre began to translate Estonian legislation into English – so that the world would understand us. Soon after that, the translation of European Union legislation into Estonian was started. In addition to launching the centre, Canadian experts passed on invaluable knowledge in the field of translation, as Canada is bilingual and therefore has a professional level of legal translation. In the first years, a quality-oriented translation process was developed. High-quality legal translation accurately reflects the content, purpose, and peculiarity of the translation, is grammatically correct and consistent in phraseology and terminology; the quality-oriented translation process requires terminology work and editing, as well as documenting the terms but also updating them as time progresses. Initially, the translation volumes were very large, approximately 80 000 pages of EU law needed to be translated into Estonian, and nearly 50 interpreters and terminologists worked at the institution or were under contract. This was a time with fewer language technologies compared to what we have today.

The Estonian Legal Translation Centre was given to the administration of the Ministry of Justice in 2005 and a little later its activities were terminated because there was no longer need for it. Now, EU law is translated by EU translators, since Estonian is one of the official languages of the EU, therefore the Member State does not have to make efforts to do so, and Estonian legislation is translated by sworn translators who have passed an examination and obtained a sworn translator's professional qualification (see Sworn Translators Act <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/519012021003/consolide/current>). The translation of Estonian parliamentary Acts is organised by Riigi Teataja (the state gazette) under the Ministry of Justice and all Estonian Acts are published consistently in Riigi Teataja as consolidated texts (i.e official wordings that include all amendments) and are also translated as such – as consolidated texts. For further information see Riigi Teataja Act <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/515032023008/consolide/current#para6>, including its § 6, and, should you wish to, browse the Riigi Teataja website in general to see consolidated texts.

The volume of Estonian Acts (amendments and new Acts) translated into English is approximately 1500 pages per year. The rates of sworn translators fulfilling this public task are set out by regulation, see § 8 of the corresponding regulation <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/123122013008?leiaKehtiv>. We recommend machine translation for this, as regulations are plentiful, and they are not all translated

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into English as opposed to parliamentary Acts. Translations of parliamentary Acts is organised by Riigi Teataja, translation of all regulations set out under these Acts is organised by the ministry in charge of the policy sector, as are translations of international agreements that fall under their policy sector. Only sworn translators are allowed to translate Acts and foreign agreements (§ 6 of the Riigi Teataja Act). We at Riigi Teataja are unable to comment on the volume of international agreements being translated each year.

Multilingual terminology bases and terminology work are organized by the Institute of the Estonian Language <https://eki.ee/en/>. Their terminology database is integrated into a platform Tõlkevärav that was newly created, the MVP version or the 1st stage of development was completed earlier this year. Machine translation technology and computer-assisted translation (CAT) technologies are not yet widely adopted in the public sector, general translation volumes increase year-by-year, and there is a growing need for assistance provided by modern technologies, including language technologies. To tackle this, the government has initiated the central translation platform project (Tõlkevärav or the *Translation Gate*) – a national platform to help the public sector manage translations, use translation memories, and machine translation. Further stages of development have foreseen that this platform be open to the private sector as well. Riigi Teataja together with sworn translators is migrating its translation management to Tõlkevärav now, and the ministries are set to do the same in the following years.

Because the translation volume of EU law is larger now and even if we would have data on how much the yearly operating costs of the Legal Translation Centre were, the monetary values have changed since the 90s and 00s. Also, keeping permanent in-house staff proved, in our case, to be much more costly than using sworn translators as we are now.

We recommend actively communicating with the European Commission, all guidelines should come from them, including how they see the accession process, in what time frame, and at what stage they would have to take over translating. There might also be various funding programs you might qualify for. In terms of past experiences, it is possible that the Commission has made some kind of overview of what this process entails per each country that has joined.

In conclusion we suggest not to form a state institution for translation and take a more up-to-date approach, this includes using machine translation and post-editing by translators and editors, in parallel also teaching the translation engine with the work done as you go along as we are planning to do. Developing the machine translation engine together with translators would cut down on the translation volume, make translating faster, help keep an eye on quality, and would also give you an edge for the future in terms of language technologies.

Our best wishes go out for you in this process – should you have any further questions we'd be glad to explain our processes in more detail.

For further information, see the following webpages:

FAQ of Riigi Teataja in English: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/faq>

Under the year 2021, the concept and full pre-development analysis of the translation portal Tõlkevärav in Estonian: <https://www.just.ee/uuringud#justiitshalduspoliitika>

Kind regards,
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