

21.03: Official notice on staff interpreters' leave



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Directorate-General for Interpretation and Conferences Official notice from the Director-General

Staff interpreters' leave

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Dear colleagues,

As most of you know, in the beginning of January 2016 a number of cornerstones for a comprehensive modernisation process for our Directorate-General were discussed between the Secretary General, DG INTE management, the staff interpreters and their representatives.

The cornerstones themselves came about as a result of a thorough analysis between April and December 2015 on the general organisation of the EP interpretation services, at the request of the Secretary General and in preparation for answering questions raised by the Committee for Budgetary Control in the Parliament discharge procedure for 2014. One important focus of this analysis was the way interpreters' working time is organised, and in particular what the patterns are in the provision of interpretation, which is the core business of the interpretation service.

One of the conclusions of this analysis was that the provision of interpretation services by staff interpreters was significantly reduced by the fact that interpreters are not fully available for interpretation assignments during Parliament's core business periods, i.e. during those times when Members have the most need for interpretation services. One of the main reasons for this limited availability was found to be the amount of annual leave taken on core business days, i.e. on working days - except Monday morning (8:30-12:45) and Friday - in Strasbourg Plenary weeks, Brussels Plenary weeks, Committee weeks and Group weeks.

This conclusion led to the 'clean days' cornerstone, which stated that 'annual leave shall not be granted during Parliament's core business days, excluding turquoise weeks'. The cornerstone provides also for individual exceptions.

Since the intention was announced to implement such a 'clean days' policy, numerous concerns have been voiced. During the last two and half months the line managers discussed the issue with their staff, the management evaluated different options and held internal discussions, there have been contacts with individual interpreters and with the staff interpreters' representatives.

Having listened to the comments both from the interpreters and from DG INTE middle management, the Management Team, after consultation with the Secretary General, has decided to adopt guidelines for the implementation in the interpreting services of Article 4(5) of the Internal Rules governing leave as adopted by decision of the Secretary-General of 5 September 2014.

These guidelines are intended to ensure, in the interest of the service, that as much as possible of the annual leave entitlement of staff interpreters is taken during periods of light workload. Proportionate in nature, these new guidelines take into account, in a flexible way, both the needs of the service and the needs of individual staff members.

The compromise that has been found is based on article 4.5 of the EP internal rules governing leave, which states that '*departments which have a light workload between part-sessions may plan their staff's leave in such a way as to ensure that as much as possible of their annual leave entitlement is used up during such periods. Each DG shall make its own arrangements in this connection, with due regard for the interests of the service*'. Moreover, it takes into account a similar solution that has been adopted in the Court of Justice.

Applying these new guidelines will allow our Directorate-General to better serve our core business in providing interpretation services by our own staff. It will increase staff interpreter availability during core business periods and thus also service productivity, whilst maintaining a degree of flexibility in the use of annual leave by staff interpreters.

The full text of the new DG INTE Guidelines can be found [here](#). The main elements of the solution are as follows:

- ▶ For the period from 1 July to 31 December 2016, it will be possible to grant staff interpreter annual leave during core business days within the limit of 3 ½ core business days. From 1 January 2017 onwards, during each calendar year, it will be possible to grant staff interpreter annual leave during core business days within the limit of 5 core business days.
- ▶ Leave during core business days will have to be requested 6 weeks in advance.
- ▶ Whilst it will be possible to take the above leave on core business days either in the form of individual days, spread over several weeks or in blocks of consecutive days, it will not be possible to take leave during core business days as half days, except for the Monday.
- ▶ Request for leave that fall within the individual quota will be granted, unless there are imperative service reasons to refuse it.
- ▶ It will also be possible to request extra leave days during core business days outside the above quota. It will be possible to make such requests on the Monday of the week before the week in which the leave is requested. These requests will be examined in the order in which they are made and will receive an answer no later than on the Friday, end of business, before the week in which the leave is requested. Furthermore it will be possible to introduce extra leave requests in the course of the week concerned.
- ▶ Last minute requests as described above will be granted if the leave does not generate additional costs to the service and there are no conflicting service needs. Last-minute requests can also be taken as half days.
- ▶ Finally, in duly justified cases whereby a leave refusal would result in an undue hardship for the colleague concerned, there will be the possibility for the Director-General to grant exceptions.

The new guidelines will be applied for the assessment of all leave requests submitted which concern dates after 1 July 2016. For all leave requests which concern the period until 30 June 2016, the current guidelines will apply.

Agnieszka Walter-Drop
Director-General