



Dear Madam President,

Following the beginning of the industrial action covered by the strike warning sent to you on last 17 June 2022 and renewed on 3 July 2022 we have been available to find an agreed solution. To date, we have attended three meetings with Mr Knudsen, Ms Walter-Drop and other members of Management. Although we have noted with satisfaction that the representative of ACIs has finally been invited to participate in the proceedings and the tone was more constructive in the latest two meetings, we cannot but reiterate our initial position according to which the proposed format and method does not allow for any progress.

We regret to inform you that EP Management still refuses to make firm commitments, let alone negotiate, on the issues that have led us to issue the strike warning in the first place, namely a new set of rules covering multilingual remote participation. We are deeply disappointed at the lack of progress for a number of reasons.

On the substance:

Interpreter representatives were not allowed to talk about assignment rules, adapted working time or specific provisions on rest after remote assignments, to name just a few examples. We remain convinced that the only way to protect interpreters' health is to regulate their exposure to harmful substandard sound. Under the circumstances, this is only possible by agreeing on a concrete text. Vague commitments on technical improvements are not enough. Management did mention a Code of conduct for remote speakers, but they did not offer any guarantees that it will be binding. Moreover, Ms Walter-Drop sent an e-mail to her opposite numbers in DG IPOL and DG EXPO stating that the EP administration was not in a position to renegotiate specific safeguards on remote interpretation.

Concerning health, we listened to the presentation of the Prevention and Well-Being at Work Unit's opinion on "remote interventions as part of simultaneous interpretation". Some conclusions were of particular interest as they made clear that multilingual remote participation would only be safe if a number of conditions are met. Among other things, the PWWU states that "minimum technical and behavioural standards for remote participation" should be established. As stated above, Ms Walter-Drop declined to reply to our questions on the binding nature of such standards. Other recommendations were quite useful as well, but they require time to be put in place. Therefore, they cannot provide a speedy solution if they do not go hand in hand with genuine talks on a regulatory framework.

On the form:

Mr Knudsen has once again chosen to invite all Trade Unions to the table invoking the Framework Agreement of 1990, most notably Article 6 thereof. We do not accept such proposition. Article 6 of the Framework Agreement lays down rules for so-called "concertation" procedures to be held in very specific cases provided for in Article 4 of the Agreement: changes to the Staff Regulations or the Rules Applicable to Other Agents,

Agreement: changes to the Staff Regulations or the Rules Applicable to Other Agents, substantial changes to the general conditions of employment or working conditions of officials or other agents and matters of general interest within the limits set out in Article 7. It is clear that the matter at hand does not fall into any of those categories as we are to discuss new “working methods” as laid down in Article 24.2 of the Interpreter Working Conditions of 2018. Also, this matter affects only a specific category of staff and not the general conditions of employment or working conditions of all EP officials or other agents.

We would like to point out that the Trade Unions that now want to participate in this process were invited to join the movement and co-sign the strike warning. They declined to do so, therefore their positions might be biased in a process that should aim to a rapid conclusion to the satisfaction of all parties, including the interpreters representatives and the two Trade Unions that lodged the strike warning.

In addition, Mr Knudsen insisted that issues relating to health monitoring and follow-up should be sorted first before moving on to the talks on the regulatory framework. Such a method would require too much time and would not be acceptable for a category of staff that has been working loyally and indefatigably under dire conditions for more than two years. Such monitoring could have been put in place earlier without the pressure of industrial action.

As for the talks on the regulatory framework, Ms Walter-Drop suggested that they should take place within DG LINC. We cannot accept such proposal as it would be more of the same after years of dysfunctional social dialogue and the refusal by DG LINC to discuss the post-Covid scenario in good time before the end of the exceptional measures as the interpreters’ representatives had asked.

In conclusion:

Three precious weeks have been wasted. Interpreters have been subject to the very stressful situation of having to switch off their microphones during remote speeches and meeting organisers have not been able to enjoy the full service they are entitled to.

In light of the above, we remain convinced that the key to overcome the current crisis is to launch talks as soon as possible on the basis of the text we have sent you and in the format suggested in our letter of 27 June last: we ask that your Cabinet be a mediator between two representatives of DG LINC Management on the one side and two interpreters’ representatives as well as our two Trade Unions (each represented by one member) on the other side. The talks would also see the participation of one member of the Cabinet of the Secretary-General, one ACI representative and one representative of the Staff Committee as observers. We would kindly ask you to use your good offices to start such process immediately after the summer recess.

In this context, we hereby lodge a new strike warning with the same modalities of the one lodged on 17 June 2022 and renewed on 3 July. This strike warning is to cover a period of 15 days after the summer recess starting on Monday 29 August 2022 and lasting until Monday 12 September included. During this period and on every working day the interpreters shall

not interpret remote interventions and they will keep deploying all the necessary communication activities to raise awareness about their situation and re-establish the facts.

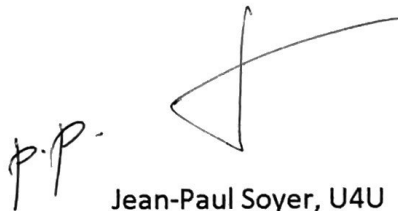
We would like to reiterate our openness to agreeing on a level of minimum service provision with DG PERS and DG LINC in full respect of the proportionality principle. At the same time, DG LINC must keep refraining from recruiting interpreters through external agencies circumventing the rules in place and in breach of Article 28 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Please allow us to reassure you once again of our commitment to reaching an agreement as quickly as possible, and to express the hope that you will be able to take a favourable view of our request.

Faithfully Yours,



Carmen Serrano Jiménez, USL



Jean-Paul Soyer, U4U