

Directive 2010/64/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2010 on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings

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PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL

of 20 October 2010

on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, and in particular point (b) of the second subparagraph of Article 82(2) thereof,

Having regard to the initiative of the Kingdom of Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Estonia, the Kingdom of Spain, the French Republic, the Italian Republic, the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Austria, the Portuguese Republic, Romania, the Republic of Finland and the Kingdom of Sweden⁽¹⁾,

After transmission of the draft legislative act to the national parliaments,

Acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure⁽²⁾,

Whereas:

- (1) The Union has set itself the objective of maintaining and developing an area of freedom, security and justice. According to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council in Tampere of 15 and 16 October 1999, and in particular point 33 thereof, the principle of mutual recognition of judgments and other decisions of judicial authorities should become the cornerstone of judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters within the Union because enhanced mutual recognition and the necessary approximation of legislation would facilitate cooperation between competent authorities and the judicial protection of individual rights.
- (2) On 29 November 2000, the Council, in accordance with the Tampere Conclusions, adopted a programme of measures to implement the principle of mutual recognition of decisions in criminal matters⁽³⁾. The introduction to the programme states that mutual recognition is ‘designed to strengthen cooperation between Member States but also to enhance the protection of individual rights’.
- (3) The implementation of the principle of mutual recognition of decisions in criminal matters presupposes that Member States have trust in each other’s criminal justice systems. The extent of mutual recognition is very much dependent on a number of parameters, which include mechanisms for safeguarding the rights of suspected or accused persons and common minimum standards necessary to facilitate the application of the principle of mutual recognition.
- (4) Mutual recognition of decisions in criminal matters can operate effectively only in a spirit of trust in which not only judicial authorities but all actors in the criminal process

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consider decisions of the judicial authorities of other Member States as equivalent to their own, implying not only trust in the adequacy of other Member States' rules, but also trust that those rules are correctly applied.

- (5) Article 6 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (hereinafter the ECHR) and Article 47 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (hereinafter the Charter) enshrine the right to a fair trial. Article 48(2) of the Charter guarantees respect for the right of defence. This Directive respects those rights and should be implemented accordingly.
- (6) Although all the Member States are party to the ECHR, experience has shown that that alone does not always provide a sufficient degree of trust in the criminal justice systems of other Member States.
- (7) Strengthening mutual trust requires a more consistent implementation of the rights and guarantees set out in Article 6 of the ECHR. It also requires, by means of this Directive and other measures, further development within the Union of the minimum standards set out in the ECHR and the Charter.
- (8) Article 82(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides for the establishment of minimum rules applicable in the Member States so as to facilitate mutual recognition of judgments and judicial decisions and police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters having a cross-border dimension. Point (b) of the second subparagraph of Article 82(2) refers to 'the rights of individuals in criminal procedure' as one of the areas in which minimum rules may be established.
- (9) Common minimum rules should lead to increased confidence in the criminal justice systems of all Member States, which, in turn, should lead to more efficient judicial cooperation in a climate of mutual trust. Such common minimum rules should be established in the fields of interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings.
- (10) On 30 November 2009, the Council adopted a resolution on a Roadmap for strengthening procedural rights of suspected or accused persons in criminal proceedings⁽⁴⁾. Taking a step-by-step approach, the Roadmap called for the adoption of measures regarding the right to translation and interpretation (measure A), the right to information on rights and information about the charges (measure B), the right to legal advice and legal aid (measure C), the right to communication with relatives, employers and consular authorities (measure D), and special safeguards for suspected or accused persons who are vulnerable (measure E).
- (11) In the Stockholm programme, adopted on 10 December 2009, the European Council welcomed the Roadmap and made it part of the Stockholm programme (point 2.4). The European Council underlined the non-exhaustive character of the Roadmap, by inviting the Commission to examine further elements of minimum procedural rights for suspected and accused persons, and to assess whether other issues, for instance the presumption of innocence, need to be addressed, in order to promote better cooperation in that area.

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- (12) This Directive relates to measure A of the Roadmap. It lays down common minimum rules to be applied in the fields of interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings with a view to enhancing mutual trust among Member States.
- (13) This Directive draws on the Commission proposal for a Council Framework Decision on the right to interpretation and to translation in criminal proceedings of 8 July 2009, and on the Commission proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings of 9 March 2010.
- (14) The right to interpretation and translation for those who do not speak or understand the language of the proceedings is enshrined in Article 6 of the ECHR, as interpreted in the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. This Directive facilitates the application of that right in practice. To that end, the aim of this Directive is to ensure the right of suspected or accused persons to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings with a view to ensuring their right to a fair trial.
- (15) The rights provided for in this Directive should also apply, as necessary accompanying measures, to the execution of a European arrest warrant⁽⁵⁾ within the limits provided for by this Directive. Executing Member States should provide, and bear the costs of, interpretation and translation for the benefit of the requested persons who do not speak or understand the language of the proceedings.
- (16) In some Member States an authority other than a court having jurisdiction in criminal matters has competence for imposing sanctions in relation to relatively minor offences. That may be the case, for example, in relation to traffic offences which are committed on a large scale and which might be established following a traffic control. In such situations, it would be unreasonable to require that the competent authority ensure all the rights under this Directive. Where the law of a Member State provides for the imposition of a sanction regarding minor offences by such an authority and there is a right of appeal to a court having jurisdiction in criminal matters, this Directive should therefore apply only to the proceedings before that court following such an appeal.
- (17) This Directive should ensure that there is free and adequate linguistic assistance, allowing suspected or accused persons who do not speak or understand the language of the criminal proceedings fully to exercise their right of defence and safeguarding the fairness of the proceedings.
- (18) Interpretation for the benefit of the suspected or accused persons should be provided without delay. However, where a certain period of time elapses before interpretation is provided, that should not constitute an infringement of the requirement that interpretation be provided without delay, as long as that period of time is reasonable in the circumstances.
- (19) Communication between suspected or accused persons and their legal counsel should be interpreted in accordance with this Directive. Suspected or accused persons should be able, inter alia, to explain their version of the events to their legal counsel, point out any statements with which they disagree and make their legal counsel aware of any facts that should be put forward in their defence.

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- (20) For the purposes of the preparation of the defence, communication between suspected or accused persons and their legal counsel in direct connection with any questioning or hearing during the proceedings, or with the lodging of an appeal or other procedural applications, such as an application for bail, should be interpreted where necessary in order to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings.
- (21) Member States should ensure that there is a procedure or mechanism in place to ascertain whether suspected or accused persons speak and understand the language of the criminal proceedings and whether they need the assistance of an interpreter. Such procedure or mechanism implies that competent authorities verify in any appropriate manner, including by consulting the suspected or accused persons concerned, whether they speak and understand the language of the criminal proceedings and whether they need the assistance of an interpreter.
- (22) Interpretation and translation under this Directive should be provided in the native language of the suspected or accused persons or in any other language that they speak or understand in order to allow them fully to exercise their right of defence, and in order to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings.
- (23) The respect for the right to interpretation and translation contained in this Directive should not compromise any other procedural right provided under national law.
- (24) Member States should ensure that control can be exercised over the adequacy of the interpretation and translation provided when the competent authorities have been put on notice in a given case.
- (25) The suspected or accused persons or the persons subject to proceedings for the execution of a European arrest warrant should have the right to challenge the finding that there is no need for interpretation, in accordance with procedures in national law. That right does not entail the obligation for Member States to provide for a separate mechanism or complaint procedure in which such finding may be challenged and should not prejudice the time limits applicable to the execution of a European arrest warrant.
- (26) When the quality of the interpretation is considered insufficient to ensure the right to a fair trial, the competent authorities should be able to replace the appointed interpreter.
- (27) The duty of care towards suspected or accused persons who are in a potentially weak position, in particular because of any physical impairments which affect their ability to communicate effectively, underpins a fair administration of justice. The prosecution, law enforcement and judicial authorities should therefore ensure that such persons are able to exercise effectively the rights provided for in this Directive, for example by taking into account any potential vulnerability that affects their ability to follow the proceedings and to make themselves understood, and by taking appropriate steps to ensure those rights are guaranteed.
- (28) When using videoconferencing for the purpose of remote interpretation, the competent authorities should be able to rely on the tools that are being developed in the context of European e-Justice (e.g. information on courts with videoconferencing equipment or manuals).

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- (29) This Directive should be evaluated in the light of the practical experience gained. If appropriate, it should be amended so as to improve the safeguards which it lays down.
- (30) Safeguarding the fairness of the proceedings requires that essential documents, or at least the relevant passages of such documents, be translated for the benefit of suspected or accused persons in accordance with this Directive. Certain documents should always be considered essential for that purpose and should therefore be translated, such as any decision depriving a person of his liberty, any charge or indictment, and any judgment. It is for the competent authorities of the Member States to decide, on their own motion or upon a request of suspected or accused persons or of their legal counsel, which other documents are essential to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings and should therefore be translated as well.
- (31) Member States should facilitate access to national databases of legal translators and interpreters where such databases exist. In that context, particular attention should be paid to the aim of providing access to existing databases through the e-Justice portal, as planned in the multiannual European e-Justice action plan 2009-2013 of 27 November 2008⁽⁶⁾.
- (32) This Directive should set minimum rules. Member States should be able to extend the rights set out in this Directive in order to provide a higher level of protection also in situations not explicitly dealt with in this Directive. The level of protection should never fall below the standards provided by the ECHR or the Charter as interpreted in the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights or the Court of Justice of the European Union.
- (33) The provisions of this Directive that correspond to rights guaranteed by the ECHR or the Charter should be interpreted and implemented consistently with those rights, as interpreted in the relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union.
- (34) Since the objective of this Directive, namely establishing common minimum rules, cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of its scale and effects, be better achieved at Union level, the Union may adopt measures in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty on European Union. In accordance with the principle of proportionality, as set out in that Article, this Directive does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve that objective.
- (35) In accordance with Article 3 of the Protocol (No 21) on the position of the United Kingdom and Ireland in respect of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, those Member States have notified their wish to take part in the adoption and application of this Directive.
- (36) In accordance with Articles 1 and 2 of the Protocol (No 22) on the position of Denmark, annexed to the Treaty on European Union and to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Denmark is not taking part in the adoption of this Directive and is not bound by it or subject to its application,

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HAVE ADOPTED THIS DIRECTIVE:

Article 1

Subject matter and scope

1 This Directive lays down rules concerning the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings and proceedings for the execution of a European arrest warrant.

2 The right referred to in paragraph 1 shall apply to persons from the time that they are made aware by the competent authorities of a Member State, by official notification or otherwise, that they are suspected or accused of having committed a criminal offence until the conclusion of the proceedings, which is understood to mean the final determination of the question whether they have committed the offence, including, where applicable, sentencing and the resolution of any appeal.

3 Where the law of a Member State provides for the imposition of a sanction regarding minor offences by an authority other than a court having jurisdiction in criminal matters, and the imposition of such a sanction may be appealed to such a court, this Directive shall apply only to the proceedings before that court following such an appeal.

4 This Directive does not affect national law concerning the presence of legal counsel during any stage of the criminal proceedings, nor does it affect national law concerning the right of access of a suspected or accused person to documents in criminal proceedings.

Article 2

Right to interpretation

1 Member States shall ensure that suspected or accused persons who do not speak or understand the language of the criminal proceedings concerned are provided, without delay, with interpretation during criminal proceedings before investigative and judicial authorities, including during police questioning, all court hearings and any necessary interim hearings.

2 Member States shall ensure that, where necessary for the purpose of safeguarding the fairness of the proceedings, interpretation is available for communication between suspected or accused persons and their legal counsel in direct connection with any questioning or hearing during the proceedings or with the lodging of an appeal or other procedural applications.

3 The right to interpretation under paragraphs 1 and 2 includes appropriate assistance for persons with hearing or speech impediments.

4 Member States shall ensure that a procedure or mechanism is in place to ascertain whether suspected or accused persons speak and understand the language of the criminal proceedings and whether they need the assistance of an interpreter.

5 Member States shall ensure that, in accordance with procedures in national law, suspected or accused persons have the right to challenge a decision finding that there is no need for interpretation and, when interpretation has been provided, the possibility to complain that the quality of the interpretation is not sufficient to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings.

6 Where appropriate, communication technology such as videoconferencing, telephone or the Internet may be used, unless the physical presence of the interpreter is required in order to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings.

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7 In proceedings for the execution of a European arrest warrant, the executing Member State shall ensure that its competent authorities provide persons subject to such proceedings who do not speak or understand the language of the proceedings with interpretation in accordance with this Article.

8 Interpretation provided under this Article shall be of a quality sufficient to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings, in particular by ensuring that suspected or accused persons have knowledge of the case against them and are able to exercise their right of defence.

Article 3

Right to translation of essential documents

1 Member States shall ensure that suspected or accused persons who do not understand the language of the criminal proceedings concerned are, within a reasonable period of time, provided with a written translation of all documents which are essential to ensure that they are able to exercise their right of defence and to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings.

2 Essential documents shall include any decision depriving a person of his liberty, any charge or indictment, and any judgment.

3 The competent authorities shall, in any given case, decide whether any other document is essential. Suspected or accused persons or their legal counsel may submit a reasoned request to that effect.

4 There shall be no requirement to translate passages of essential documents which are not relevant for the purposes of enabling suspected or accused persons to have knowledge of the case against them.

5 Member States shall ensure that, in accordance with procedures in national law, suspected or accused persons have the right to challenge a decision finding that there is no need for the translation of documents or passages thereof and, when a translation has been provided, the possibility to complain that the quality of the translation is not sufficient to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings.

6 In proceedings for the execution of a European arrest warrant, the executing Member State shall ensure that its competent authorities provide any person subject to such proceedings who does not understand the language in which the European arrest warrant is drawn up, or into which it has been translated by the issuing Member State, with a written translation of that document.

7 As an exception to the general rules established in paragraphs 1, 2, 3 and 6, an oral translation or oral summary of essential documents may be provided instead of a written translation on condition that such oral translation or oral summary does not prejudice the fairness of the proceedings.

8 Any waiver of the right to translation of documents referred to in this Article shall be subject to the requirements that suspected or accused persons have received prior legal advice or have otherwise obtained full knowledge of the consequences of such a waiver, and that the waiver was unequivocal and given voluntarily.

9 Translation provided under this Article shall be of a quality sufficient to safeguard the fairness of the proceedings, in particular by ensuring that suspected or accused persons have knowledge of the case against them and are able to exercise their right of defence.

Article 4

Costs of interpretation and translation

Member States shall meet the costs of interpretation and translation resulting from the application of Articles 2 and 3, irrespective of the outcome of the proceedings.

Article 5

Quality of the interpretation and translation

1 Member States shall take concrete measures to ensure that the interpretation and translation provided meets the quality required under Article 2(8) and Article 3(9).

2 In order to promote the adequacy of interpretation and translation and efficient access thereto, Member States shall endeavour to establish a register or registers of independent translators and interpreters who are appropriately qualified. Once established, such register or registers shall, where appropriate, be made available to legal counsel and relevant authorities.

3 Member States shall ensure that interpreters and translators be required to observe confidentiality regarding interpretation and translation provided under this Directive.

Article 6

Training

Without prejudice to judicial independence and differences in the organisation of the judiciary across the Union, Member States shall request those responsible for the training of judges, prosecutors and judicial staff involved in criminal proceedings to pay special attention to the particularities of communicating with the assistance of an interpreter so as to ensure efficient and effective communication.

Article 7

Record-keeping

Member States shall ensure that when a suspected or accused person has been subject to questioning or hearings by an investigative or judicial authority with the assistance of an interpreter pursuant to Article 2, when an oral translation or oral summary of essential documents has been provided in the presence of such an authority pursuant to Article 3(7), or when a person has waived the right to translation pursuant to Article 3(8), it will be noted that these events have occurred, using the recording procedure in accordance with the law of the Member State concerned.

Article 8

Non-regression

Nothing in this Directive shall be construed as limiting or derogating from any of the rights and procedural safeguards that are ensured under the European Convention for the

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Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, other relevant provisions of international law or the law of any Member State which provides a higher level of protection.

Article 9

Transposition

1 Member States shall bring into force the laws, regulations and administrative provisions necessary to comply with this Directive by 27 October 2013.

2 Member States shall transmit the text of those measures to the Commission.

3 When Member States adopt those measures, they shall contain a reference to this Directive or be accompanied by such a reference on the occasion of their official publication. The methods of making such reference shall be laid down by the Member States.

Article 10

Report

The Commission shall, by 27 October 2014, submit a report to the European Parliament and to the Council, assessing the extent to which the Member States have taken the necessary measures in order to comply with this Directive, accompanied, if necessary, by legislative proposals.

Article 11

Entry into force

This Directive shall enter into force on the 20th day following its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

Article 12

Addressees

This Directive is addressed to the Member States in accordance with the Treaties.

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Done at Strasbourg, 20 October 2010.

For the European Parliament

The President

J. BUZEK

For the Council

The President

O. CHASTEL

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- (1) [OJ C 69, 18.3.2010, p. 1.](#)
- (2) Position of the European Parliament of 16 June 2010 (not yet published in the Official Journal) and decision of the Council of 7 October 2010.
- (3) [OJ C 12, 15.1.2001, p. 10.](#)
- (4) [OJ C 295, 4.12.2009, p. 1.](#)
- (5) Council Framework Decision 2002/584/JHA of 13 June 2002 on the European arrest warrant and the surrender procedures between Member States ([OJ L 190, 18.7.2002, p. 1.](#)).
- (6) [OJ C 75, 31.3.2009, p. 1.](#)