

Dear Colleagues,

For several months now, following a public tender procedure, H-O-P has been providing conference interpreting services to the General Secretariat of the Council (GSC). During this period, we have chosen to remain focused on what truly matters: delivering high-quality interpretation services with professionalism and dedication. We believe the time is now right to provide you with an update on our achievements so far, the challenges we have encountered, and our perspective looking ahead.

It is important to begin by noting that the selection of H-O-P by the GSC followed a transparent and competitive process based on quality and in-depth understanding of the EU conference interpretation sector, rather than on price alone. The Council deliberately avoided awarding the contract solely on cost criteria, recognizing that quality interpretation requires fair and sustainable working conditions. Indeed, our current working conditions are comparable to those that were already in place before the start of our contract, and we are proud of the fact that they correspond to the highest standards of remuneration and working conditions currently applied in the private sector.

Our understanding is that the GSC was guided, among other considerations, by a need for greater flexibility, for which the private sector offers high-quality alternatives. It is also important to recall that the GSC is not a signatory to the AIIC/EU Agreement and uses alternative frameworks to complement its operational requirements, in accordance with the Financial Regulations. Similar frameworks are also implemented by other EU institutions and bodies, including the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the Committee of the Regions (CoR), the European Parliament (EP), some DGs of the European Commission (EC) and the European Central Bank (ECB). Such precedents demonstrate that collaboration with the private sector and outside the AIIC/EU Agreement is neither new nor unusual within the EU institutional ecosystem.

We are grateful for the positive feedback received from delegations and colleagues alike. In this regard, the Council's internal quality monitoring exercise has yielded excellent results for H-O-P, with 95% of analysed samples rated as "good", "very good" or "excellent". This quality analysis is highly encouraging and clear proof we are on the right path.

We have taken action in response to the negative feedback received during some Coreper I Council meetings, whether through our quality monitoring exercise or other channels. This feedback was investigated very seriously, and appropriate measures were taken to ensure that such incidents do not happen again. We believe this is a normal and necessary process, as it would have been presumptuous to think we could immediately match the level of service built over decades by a public interpretation service in such demanding meetings. We are passionate, committed, and relentlessly working to improve.

To all interpreters who have worked with us so far, we extend our heartfelt gratitude. Your unwavering commitment, exceptional expertise, and remarkable adaptability have been central to our success. Your professionalism and dedication have ensured high standards of service.

We are continually inspired by the collaboration, mutual support, and camaraderie within our teams, which make us truly proud to be part of this project.

Our door remains open should you need any support, wish to share feedback, or offer recommendations for further improvement. We deeply value your insights and look forward to continuing this journey together, confident that we can reach even greater heights.

As regards our relationship with the GSC, it is excellent and characterized by a high degree of transparency. We are grateful to work with an institution which demonstrates such a genuine understanding and support. Our success is also attributable to their continuous support, which has been communicated to us on a regular basis.

Nonetheless, we have observed that some influential individuals have been trying to undermine the contract between HOP and the GSC. We especially regret hearing reports that some colleagues have faced disturbing pressure or criticism for working with us. We have provided all possible support to these colleagues. Creating fear in a free market does not improve working conditions and it should not be tolerated in any professional environment.

This is particularly concerning given that these actors are considered as standard bearers of ethics and professionalism. By their actions, they are attempting to prevent interpreters from making their own informed choices about where to work, and with whom. Constructive dialogue among the different stakeholders of the interpretation market should guide our decisions.

Such actions go against the spirit of peer support that defines our profession and contradict the fundamental principles upon which EU democracies are built, notably the freedom to work. For instance, as stated in Article 7 of the AIIC Code of Professional Ethics, members are expected to extend moral assistance and collegiality to one another: *"It shall be the duty of members of the Association to afford their colleagues moral assistance and collegiality."* This principle should guide the interpreting community. We are disappointed to see that some of these values and objectives have been overlooked in recent months.

We especially think that newly accredited colleagues, accredited colleagues based outside of Brussels and non-accredited colleagues could all really benefit from working with us. Many of them have the working capacity, talent and professionalism to be involved in delivering a high standard of service on an EU level.

Improving working conditions in the private sector is a worthy objective, one that we believe we contribute significantly to.

Despite all challenges, H-O-P successfully delivered 100% of the meetings requested by the GSC during the Danish Presidency in 2025: 11 PEC meetings, 17 Coreper I ministerial councils (4 in Luxembourg), 14 press briefings, 32 Coreper I meetings, 15 Special Committees on Agriculture (SCA), and 36 trilogues. We have demonstrated flexibility, sometimes organising last-minute meetings or parallel sessions in multiple locations.

Throughout the Danish presidency we were pleased to have worked with an active pool of 57% of ACI interpreters and 77% either AIIC or ACI interpreters. We continue to recruit for upcoming assignments throughout the Cyprus Presidency.

We are also pleased to note the evolution of our portfolio, with the responsibility of providing interpretation for specific Working Parties now entrusted to us with a view to building capacity and expertise in this type of meeting, whilst a limited number (5 meetings) of Coreper I Council meetings will be temporarily reassigned to the public service provider. Coreper I Councils of Ministers remain in our portfolio, with at least 10 meetings for this first semester, in Brussels and Luxemburg. We see this as a demonstration of the trust the GSC places in us: indeed, the GSC has repeatedly confirmed this trust in our ability to support some of its most demanding and diverse meetings.

If you are considering joining us, we encourage you to speak with colleagues who have already worked with H-O-P, or to contact us in order to form your own opinion based on firsthand experience and information.

Through this letter, we also wish to reach out to interpreters who may feel they declined too quickly or did not respond to our requests due to hesitation or pressure. We understand the situation many of you faced and would be happy to work with you. Please note that you are not alone: it is with great pleasure that we are already welcoming a considerable number of interpreters who initially declined our offers and later chose to join us after reconsideration.

If you wish to join us, please contact us at work@h-o-p.eu.

Thank you for your professionalism and for taking the time to read this message. Our door remains open for discussion, and our commitment is unchanged.

We wish you all a healthy and successful year ahead.

With passion, respect, commitment and determination,

The H-O-P Team