



Ms. Soledad Becerril Bustamante
Defensora del Pueblo
c/Zurbano 42
28010 Madrid / Spain

Sent only in electronic form

26 September 2016

Re.: Complaint by APTIJ concerning the provision of interpreting services in Spanish courts

Dear Ms. Becerril Bustamante,

APTIJ (Asociación Profesional de Traductores e Intèrpretes Judiciales y Jurados), a full member association of EULITA (European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association), has informed us of its complaint to the Spanish Ombudsman concerning problems with the provision of interpreting services in Spanish courts.

The right to a fair trial for persons unfamiliar with the language used in court has been recognized as a fundamental right of citizens. The quality of the interpreting services is a vital factor in ensuring this right. Directive 2010/64 EU on the right to interpretation and translation in criminal proceedings is the most recent EU law instrument which supports this right and calls upon EU Member States to ensure not only the provision of interpreting and translation services but also a high quality of these services.

Unfortunately, experience in several EU Member States, including Spain, has shown that public authorities will often opt to use commercial agencies for the provision of interpreting and translation services. The contracts with these commercial agencies will usually not comprise stipulations on the qualifications of the interpreters and translators employed by these agencies. Needless to say that – as commercial undertakings – the primary concern of these agencies is profit optimization, which results in a situation where the quality of the interpreting services will be a matter of little interest.

Everywhere in Europe, including Spain, universities train interpreters and translators who can provide high-quality interpreting and translation services. It is therefore difficult to understand why courts and public authorities do not resort to the services of these qualified language professionals. After all, it is public money that is spent on their academic training. At the same time, courts run the risk of violating fundamental rights of persons who are not familiar with the court language. Such situations have repeatedly led to a miscarriage of justice in several EU Member States.

EULITA calls upon the Spanish Ombudsman to support the complaint addressed by APTIJ, in cooperation with other Spanish professional associations of interpreters and translators, and to investigate the problems in Spain concerning the provision of interpreting services in Spanish courts and police stations in order to contribute to an amelioration of the current situation.

Thank you for your consideration of the current matter. Please do not hesitate to contact EULITA if you need any more information or assistance in connection with an investigation of the legal interpreting and translation services in Spanish courts and police stations.

Yours sincerely,



Liese Katschinka
President of EULITA