

Sectoral Assembly of the Languages Service (March 2016–February 2017)

Minutes of the 3rd meeting of the Bureau¹

Held in room E.4116 on Thursday, 16 June 2016, at 2 p.m.

Attended by: Luis SARABIA UTRILLA (President), Ahmed GHAILAN (ATS), Jamila CHEDAD (ATPU), Leslie FILLION-WILKINSON (ETS, note-taker), Ashley BUNTING SEEBER (ETPU), Mathias ARMINJON (FTS), Olivier MEYER (FTS), Alexei IVANOV (RTS), Ruth MAQUERA (STPU), Juan SANCHEZ PEREZ (ES), Elena ISSAEVA (Reference Unit), Jiaxiang WANG (Reference Unit) and Miguel MORENO (Terminology Unit).

Agenda

- I. Expression of condolence
- II. Adoption of the agenda
- III. Activities of the President since the previous meeting
- IV. TPU feedback on timekeeping, including the FWA pilot project
- V. Other matters

The meeting began at 2 p.m.

I. Expression of condolence

1. Mr. Sarabia Utrilla conveyed the Bureau's condolences to the Russian Translation Section for the sudden loss earlier that week of their esteemed colleague, Serguei Dratchov.

II. Adoption of the agenda

2. *The agenda was adopted without modifications.*

III. Activities of the President since the previous meeting

3. Mr. Sarabia Utrilla said that he had attended a meeting of the Staff Relations Management Group where Ms. Chaoui of the Coordinating Council had raised the issue of productivity as a source of stress for staff. Ms. Momal-Vanian had said that it was important to increase compliance but not at the expense of staff well-being, so she would discuss the issue with Ms. Keating. Concerns over management interference in the functioning of the Sectoral Assembly had also been raised.
4. He had also attended a Chiefs meeting where it had been decided that the Bureau's paper on compensatory time off would be discussed at their next meeting.

IV. TPU feedback on timekeeping, including the FWA pilot project

5. In response to a question by Ms. Bunting Seeber, the TPU representatives in attendance said that there had not been any negative feedback in their units about the pilot project on flexible work. **It was agreed that a position paper on timekeeping and productivity in the TPUs would be drafted for submission at a subsequent meeting of the Bureau.**

¹ Unless otherwise stated, the opinions reflected herein represent staff suggestions and views collected by their representatives and are aimed at promoting communication between management and staff. In order to avoid misunderstandings, any comments or requests for corrections to the minutes should be submitted to the President of the LSSA only, for inclusion in the minutes of the following meeting.

V. Other matters

Statistics, productivity and compliance

6. A discussion took place regarding statistics where some members pointed out that the purpose of the statistics remained unclear, particularly in the Reference Unit, which was in transition and, unlike other sections/units, did not have a set workload standard. Furthermore, some of the indicators, such as "output", were either inaccurately or incompletely defined or not based on any statute, administrative instruction or General Assembly resolution. It was widely agreed that several of the indicators, especially the compliance rate, would be more accurately portrayed and less harmful to staff morale if measured at the section rather than individual level. Moreover, in the context of budget constraints, staff were being treated as the soft variable when in fact they were already being squeezed nearly beyond capacity; tackling other factors, namely the number, quality and length of the documents submitted for translation, would be a much more sustainable way of boosting figures.

7. It was suggested that making the deadline for each stage of the document chain more flexible and more reflective of the length and difficulty of documents would be a simple way of improving compliance. It was pointed out that the compliance rate was artificial at best because it did not take into account in-session documents—for which deadlines were met nearly 100 % of time—or the number of pages. Therefore, it could be inflated by "sacrificing" a 200-page document for the benefit of several shorter documents.

8. Pending a reply by MERS to several questions asked by a Bureau representative on the nature of its mandate, it was suggested that it might be worthwhile to hold a meeting with MERS. If there already were guidelines on the appropriate use of statistics, they should be shared with staff; if not, some should be developed in order to prevent abuse and unequal treatment of staff.

Umoja

9. In the light of widespread discontent among users and Umoja's patent failure to meet the Organization's needs despite a colossal outlay, **it was agreed that the Bureau would ask the Coordinating Council to seek an independent external evaluation of the system.**

10. It was suggested that the list of priority issues to be addressed in future should be shared with staff so that staff may comment on the level of urgency of issues of importance to them and their work.

Staff to management feedback

11. It was widely felt that staff as a whole were not given sufficient time to provide thoughtful feedback, for example on the recommendations made by the working groups. In that connection, it was suggested that the Sectoral Assembly—as the body mandated to represent the interests of all LS staff at UNOG—be duly consulted in any future discussion of possible changes to the Service's work. Accordingly, **it was agreed that the President should have a discussion with the LS Chief** in order to identify ways in which that consultation could take place, including proper consideration of feedback provided by staff.

Language and other training

12. A discussion took place regarding the new policy² that special assignment (SPA) would be granted only to those taking a language that would benefit the Organization. The policy was seen as

² See minutes of the Q&A held with Michelle Keating on 12 May 2016.

discriminatory because no other UNOG staff were subject to such rigorous timekeeping—or to any measurable productivity standard. It was also short-sighted given that a section/unit's needs evolved over time as staff retired, transferred elsewhere or resigned. Lastly, the policy was completely inconsistent with the Organization's mobility policy whereby staff were encouraged to move to other jobs or duty stations and therefore could conceivably end up in a post or location where a particular language was an asset. **It was agreed that the President should also raise this issue during his discussion with the LS Chief.**

13. Ms. Bunting Seeber heartily recommended that staff attend the UN For All - Respect for Diversity training. It included a session specifically on inclusive language and “people-first” language that was particularly relevant to language professionals.

Next meetings

14. In order to accommodate summer leave while keeping the gap between meetings to a minimum, the next two would be held in the third week of July and the first week of September.

The meeting rose at 4 p.m.