

A Proposal for Language Policy for CERN Communication

Talking about languages is balancing out: bureaucracy and wasting time for translations nobody will read – and fulfilling the expectations everybody has thinking of CERN as one of the biggest laboratories in the world and the cradle of the World Wide Web. Limiting translation to the two languages mentioned in the convention is not easily defensible, because in practise there is not really a coherent bilingualism at CERN. Some areas are nearly monolingual, building a gap especially between the French speaking technicians and the English speaking scientific community. Others, like the Council Sessions are trilingual.

For inside CERN (CERN staff) and the scientific community, English and French are enough, because these audiences are familiar with at least one of these languages. Further translations would be no more than cosmetic. For outside (outreach/website/press releases...) CERN should offer five languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. This is a quite good community picture (most important languages at CERN, more than 75 % of the budget...) and a practical way to handle. (Brochures should become translated in all member-state-languages)

To implement these languages CERN should determine or hire for each added language a “Language Person” (LP). Firstly six month in a fulltime job, later on in part-time. In addition to that CERN should determine for every other language a “Native Supervisor”. In contradiction to EPPCN the LPs and Native Supervisors should become part of CERN Communication Group (to participate in the flow of information) and they should be the direct contact for EPPCN. At the moment CERN treats translations in other languages than English and French like an “out-sourced” project, done on request: voluntarily, sporadically and honorably. This is in some way a missed opportunity, because if translation is an integral part of communication CERN can use it to manage a message (e.g. same wording in all translated press releases). This helps to establish a CERN “branding” and to convey a “feeling”. The international teamwork atmosphere is besides excellent physics the best advertisement CERN has. Nowadays the web is the flagship for every institution and for most people it is the key entry point. It is ridiculous that CERN, home of the web, does not have a modern, multilingual website running on a content management system.

In comparison to CERN's budget the amount of money that is needed to create a new website with a content management system (6 more people for in maximum one year) and to have 3 more LPs (part-time-jobs) is modest. It was a missed opportunity for CERN not to present a multilingual website at the 20th anniversary of the www. The next chance will be the finding of Higgs Boson, when people around the world are engaged to click on CERN web pages to find information.