



EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS
COUR EUROPÉENNE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

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“Bringing the Convention closer to home”

The Court’s case-law translations project (2012-2016): Achievements and remaining challenges

1. *Introduction*

The Court’s case-law information, training and outreach programme *“Bringing the Convention closer to home”* aims at improving accessibility to and understanding of leading Convention principles and standards at the national level, in line with the conclusions of the Interlaken, Izmir, Brighton and Brussels Conferences. Within this programme the Registry has made available several thousand case-law translations; has released *COURTalks-disCOURs* training videos; is developing additional language versions of the interface for searching in the HUDOC case-law database; and is offering case-law guides, European law handbooks and other publications in multiple languages.

Increasingly, partner institutions are also translating the Court’s case-law guides and other materials for their own needs while simultaneously making them available on the Court’s website. Updates on the latest publications, translations and other case-law information tools are made available via a dedicated multilingual Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/echrpublication>).¹

2. *Achievements*

A key component of the Court’s outreach programme was the four-year project for translating key case-law into twelve target languages which was implemented by the Registry’s Case-Law Information and Publications Division with the support of the Human

¹ For more details please see *“Bringing the Convention home: case-law information, training and outreach”* (extract from the Court’s Annual Report 2016) available at:

http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Case_law_info_training_outreach_2016_ENG.pdf

Rights Trust Fund (HRTF).² The objective of this project was to improve the understanding and domestic implementation of Convention standards by commissioning translations of key Court case-law and ensuring its dissemination to legal professionals and civil society. The beneficiary States were Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey and Ukraine.³ The total funding provided came to EUR 1.6 million, the support of the Human Rights Trust Fund having been particularly significant (EUR 1,340,000).

In the course of this project over 3,500 translations were commissioned from some 70 vetted external translators, published in the HUDOC database and further disseminated both by national-level partners and Council of Europe departments. The material translated consisted of case-law of Europe-wide significance, principally the cases which the Court's Bureau had selected for publication in the Court's official series *Reports of Judgments and Decisions* (about 30 cases per year).

A stakeholder survey in 2016 showed a satisfaction rate in excess of 90% as regards the quality of the translations. Well over 90% of the respondents also indicated having had the opportunity to use the translations in legal practice, education and training or in decision-making.

Prior to outsourcing translations the Registry took stock of already existing case-law translations in order to avoid duplication. In addition, translations commissioned by the Court were listed on its Internet site so as to minimise the risk that a third party would translate the same judgment.⁴

Ever since the start of this project the Registry has maintained an open invitation to States, judicial training centres, associations of legal professionals, NGOs and other partners to offer, for inclusion in HUDOC, any case-law translations to which they have the rights.⁵ By way of example, a number of governmental institutions agreed to have their existing and future translations republished in HUDOC. To date, over 17,000 additional translations have

² More information on HRTF is available at: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/programmes/human-rights-trust-fund>

³ In addition to the official languages of these beneficiary States, the Registry has also commissioned translations of leading case-law and related materials into Bulgarian, Czech, Greek, Hungarian, Russian and Spanish.

⁴ For more information, including the lists of project partners and cases selected for translation into each language see the Court's website under [Case-law/Judgments and decisions/Case-law translations](#). Translations into languages other than the Court's official languages English and French are published with a disclaimer since the only authentic language version(s) of a judgment or decision are in one or both of the Court's official languages.

⁵ The Registry also references on its website third-party sites hosting translations of the Court's case-law and welcomes suggestions for the inclusion of further sites. More information can be found on the Court's website under [Case-law/Judgments and decisions/Case-law translations/Existing translations/External online collections of translations](#); scroll down to see the list of third-party sites.

been provided for republication. In total some 21,000 texts in thirty-one languages other than English and French have now been made available in HUDOC. Such translations now amount to 15% of all HUDOC content. These figures confirm the significant multiplier impact of this project which effectively has made HUDOC the first port of call for translations of the Court's case-law.⁶

3. *Challenges and prospects*

The translations which the Court commissioned over the duration of this project filled a significant gap. It is clear however that its ordinary budget has never been intended to – nor can it be expected to – sustain the cost of translating, on a more permanent basis, its leading cases into “non-official” languages. As the Council of Europe member States concluded already at the very first Conference on the future of the Court (at [Interlaken](#)), it is first and foremost the responsibility of the State Parties to guarantee the application and implementation of the Convention.

The translations project was an important catalyst for setting up a network of partners ensuring the translation of cases and publications into languages other than English and French. The longer-term sustainability of the project achievements will depend on partner institutions in each member State being designated to organise the translation of the Court's leading cases into the national language(s). To that end, the Registrar of the Court wrote to all States in 2013 and 2014 to suggest that they consider arranging the translation of those cases which the Court's Bureau considers to be of Europe-wide importance. A number of States have responded positively to this invitation and the Court expects that others will still follow.⁷ It should be recalled here that the [2015 Brussels Declaration](#) called upon States Parties to promote accessibility to the Court's case-law by translating or summarising significant judgments as required.⁸

The Court stresses the need to make the key case-law accessible to domestic courts and other relevant actors throughout Europe, thereby reinforcing the principle of subsidiarity. It will pursue its own efforts in this area and will continue to seek voluntary financial contributions from member States and other potential donors.

⁶ The language-specific filter in HUDOC allows for rapid searching of these translations, including in free text. As a spin-off to the project, a HUDOC interface in Turkish was launched in 2013 and a Russian one in 2014, to be followed by a Spanish version in 2017. Plans are underway to develop Bulgarian, Georgian and Ukrainian versions.

⁷ See Annex 3 to the Court's 2014 report in follow-up to the Interlaken Conference, available under http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/2014_Interlaken_Process_ENG.pdf In addition, under the recent agreements for developing further language versions of the HUDOC interface Bulgaria, Georgia and Ukraine will be making best efforts to translate the leading cases which the Court's Bureau selects for publication in its official series.

⁸ The Declaration and examples of translation practices adopted in various States are available at: www.coe.int/t/DGHL/STANDARDSETTING/CDDH/REFORMECHR/Publications/Proceedings-Brussels-Conference-2015.pdf.

Press releases:

[Press release of 21 December 2009 - The court launches further information tools, including case-law in non-official languages](#)

[Press release of 6 July 2012 - Case-law Translations Project with the support of the Human Rights Trust Fund](#)

[Press release of 14 November 2013 - Court launches HUDOC case-law database in Turkish](#)

[Press release of 14 April 2014 - Court launches HUDOC case-law database in Russian](#)

[Press release of 5 October 2015 - Court opens multilingual Twitter account for news on case-law publications](#)

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Partner departments within the Council of Europe:

[Commissioner for Human Rights](#)

[Department for the Execution of the Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights](#)

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