Latvian Language – Riga versus Brussels

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In this presentation

- Multilingualism and translation in the European Commission

- Latvia and its languages

- Terminological case studies – Riga versus Brussels

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Multilingualism and Translation in the European Commission

DG Translation

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What is multilingualism?

- Several languages spoken within a geographical area

- A person's ability to master several languages

- A policy requiring an organisation/ a company/an institution to use several languages for communication

EU official languages over time
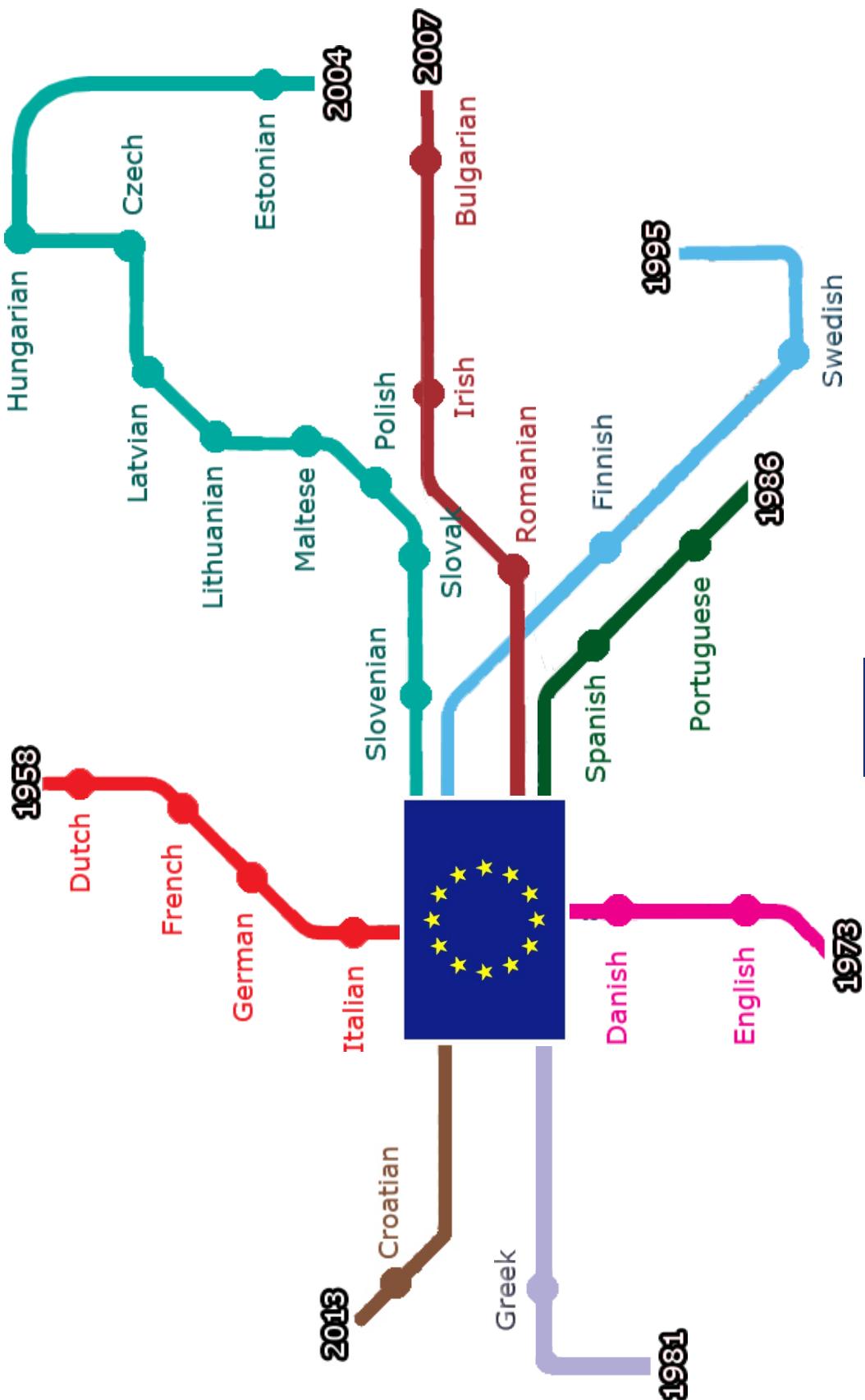
We translate from and into all the EU's 24 official languages
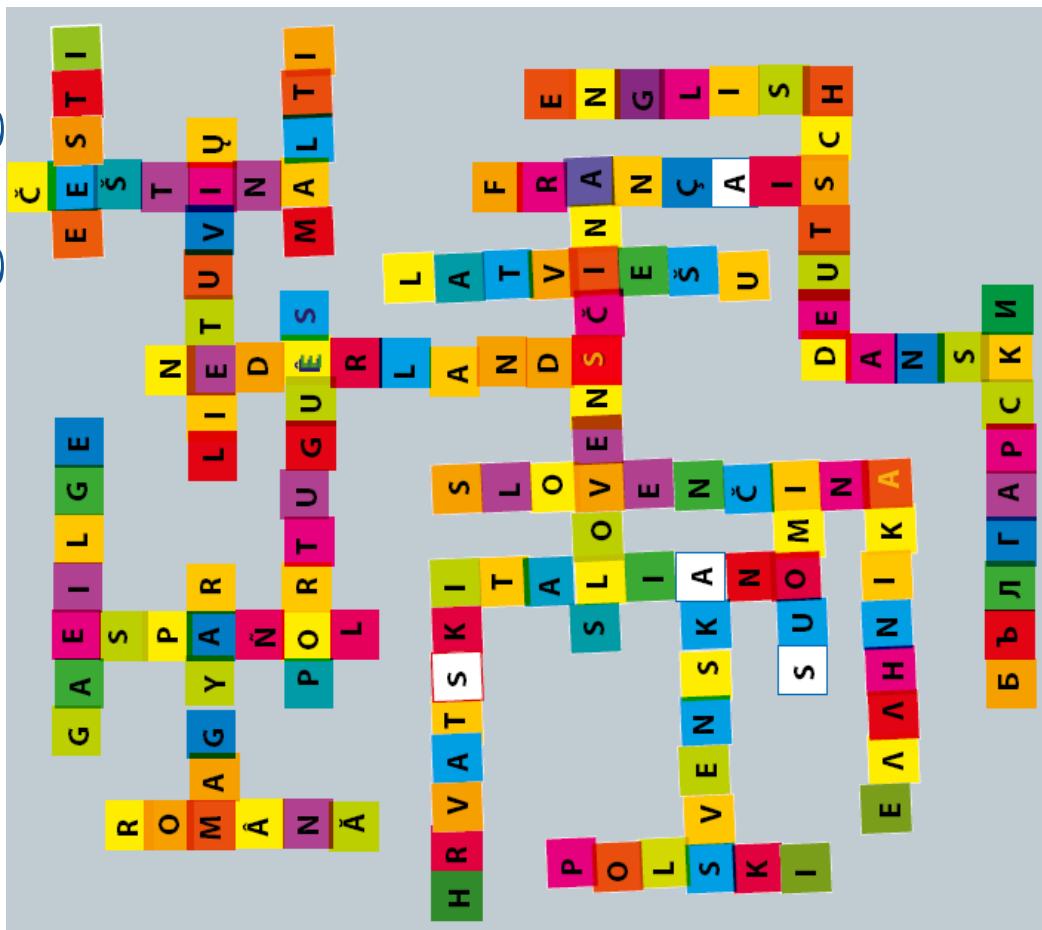
The legal basis

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

- Citizens have a right to address the official EU bodies in any of the EU's official languages and to receive a reply in that language.

Council Regulation No 1/58

- Regulations and other documents of general application shall be drafted in the official languages.

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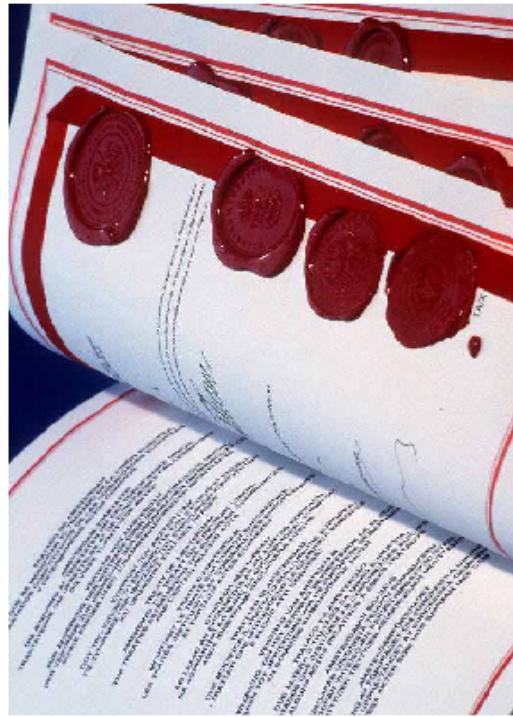
Translation or drafting?

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- The linguistic versions of legislative texts are considered authentic documents (not mere translations!)

- Regulations – directly applicable (the adopted text is valid in the Member State without an implementing act)

- Directives – implementing act adopted in the Member State by national law

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Types of languages

- Official languages: 24

- Working languages in the Commission: English, French, German

- Additional languages: Basque, Catalan, Galician, Scottish Gaelic and Welsh

Additional languages

Commission

Citizens

UK or Spain

Commission departments

Designated body Translation

Original letter or e-mail + translation into official language

Reply in the official language

Written communication in the regional language

Reply in the regional language

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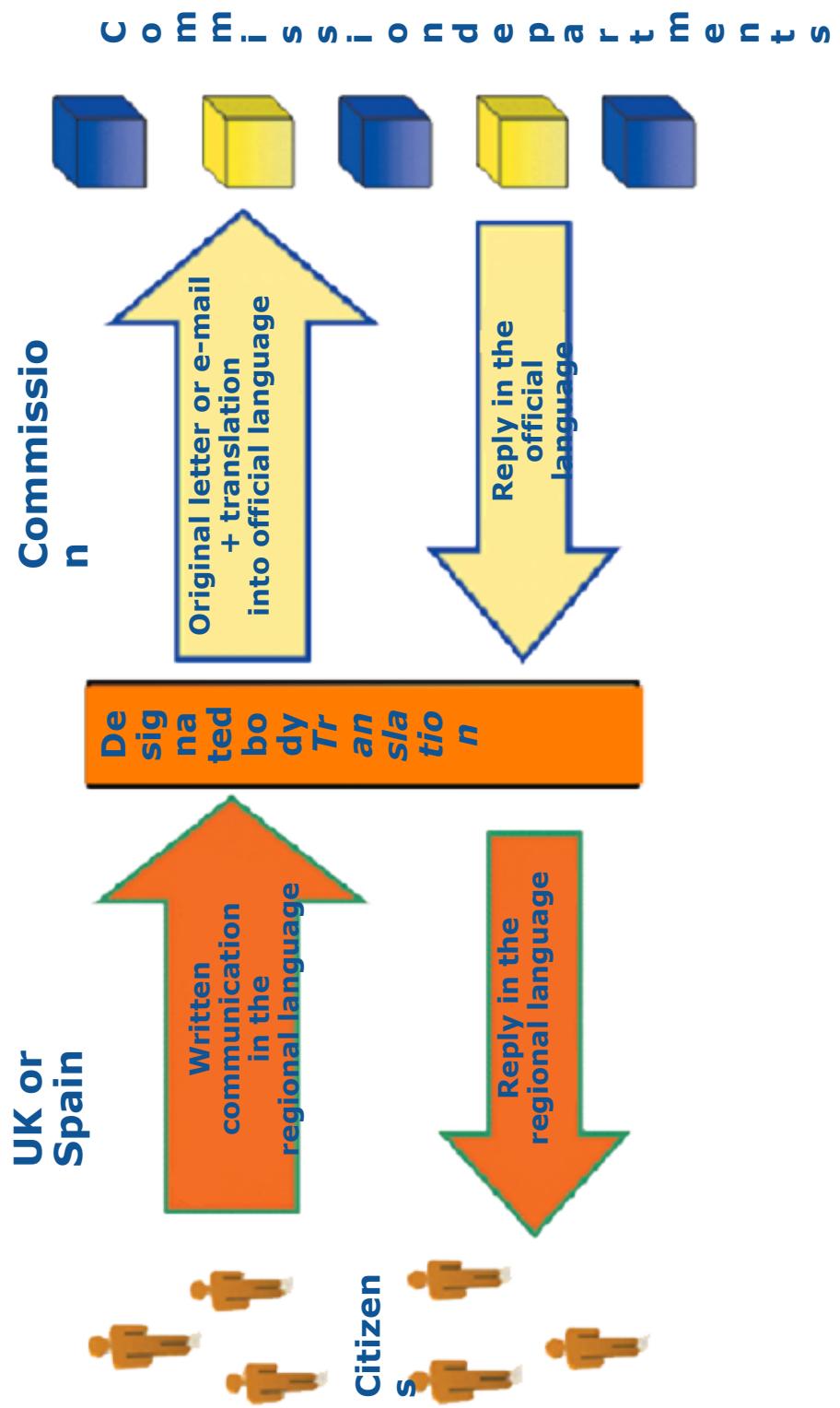
DGT output 2018:
2 million translated pages – 2300 staff
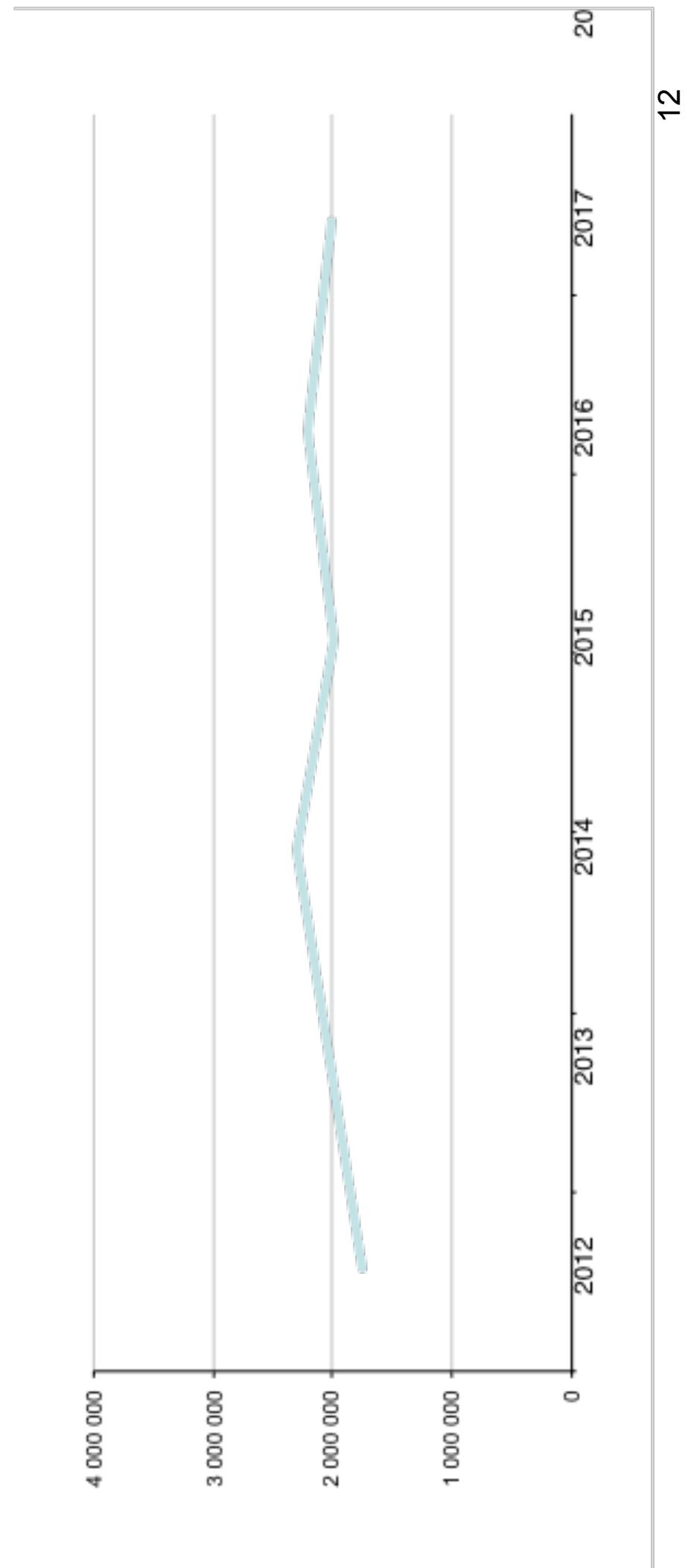
Languages of source documents

English 84%

Others 11%

French 3%

German 2%

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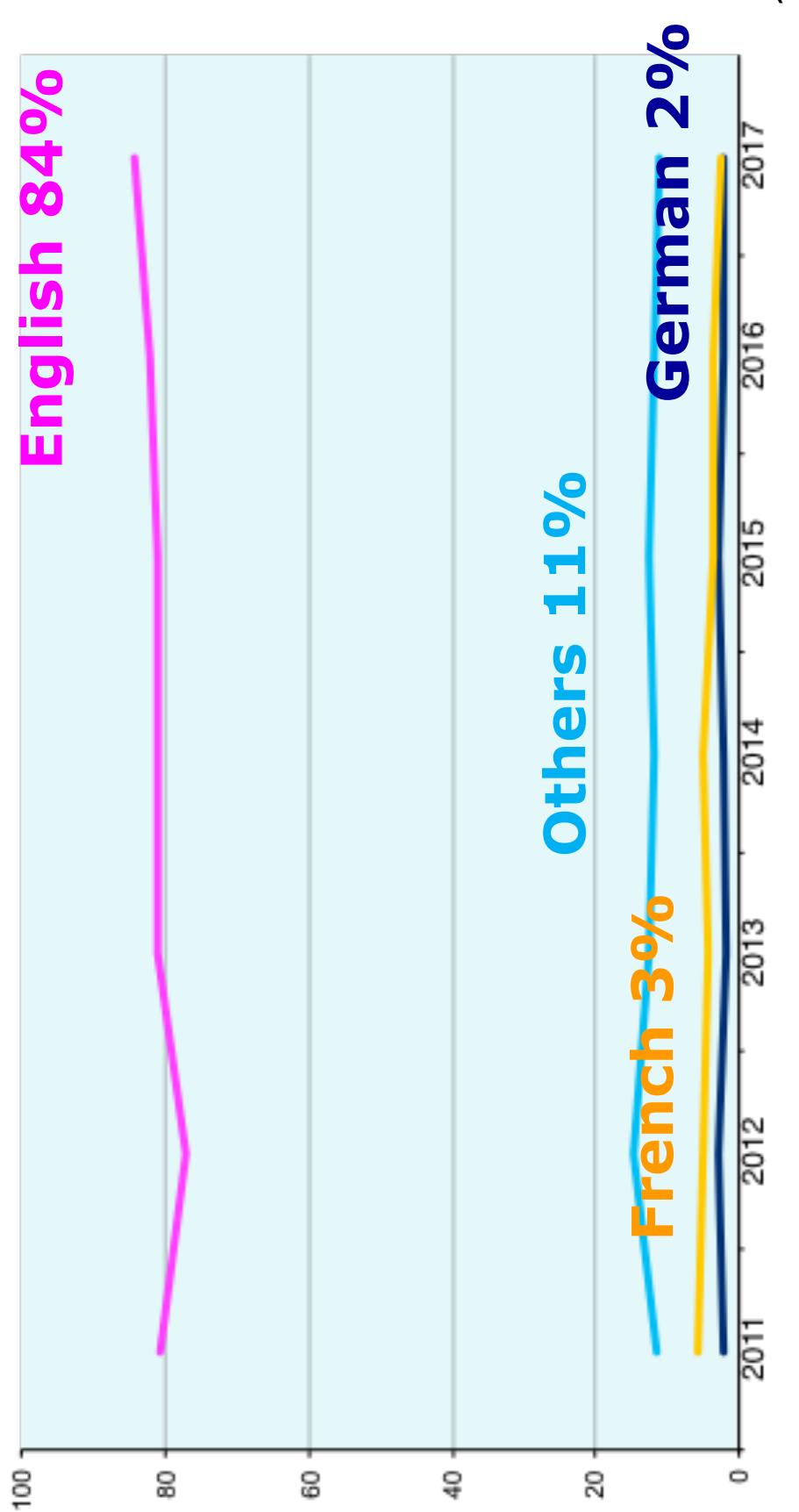
Languages of target documents
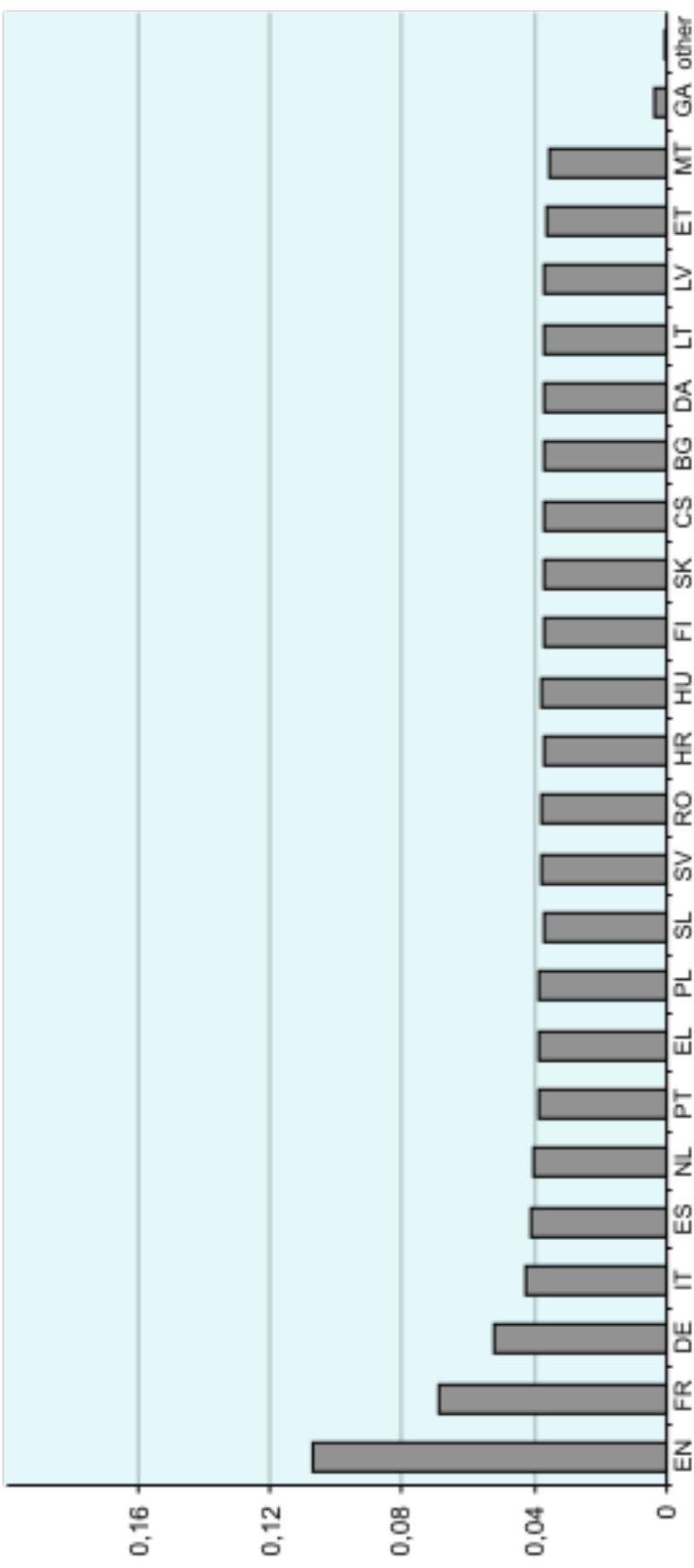
Latvian translation department

Situation at 01/10/2018:

- 2 units
- 58 translators of whom majority in Luxembourg, 4 in Brussels and a Field Officer in Riga. Includes functions such as terminologist and quality officer
- 9 assistants
- 2 trainees

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Field offices of the Commission

- DGT translator(s) working at the Commission Representation in each EU country

- Twofold role:
  - Translate and localise the Commission's message
  - Create and maintain contacts with DGT's stakeholders; communication and public relations

- Organise and promote events and projects (e.g. translation competition for pupils "Juvenes Translatores")

Latvia and its Languages

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3 Baltic states

- Estonia (45 000 km2, 1.3 million people)

- Latvia (65 000 km2, 1.9 million people)

- Lithuania (65 000 km2, 2.8 million people)

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The glossogenetic tree of Indo-European languages
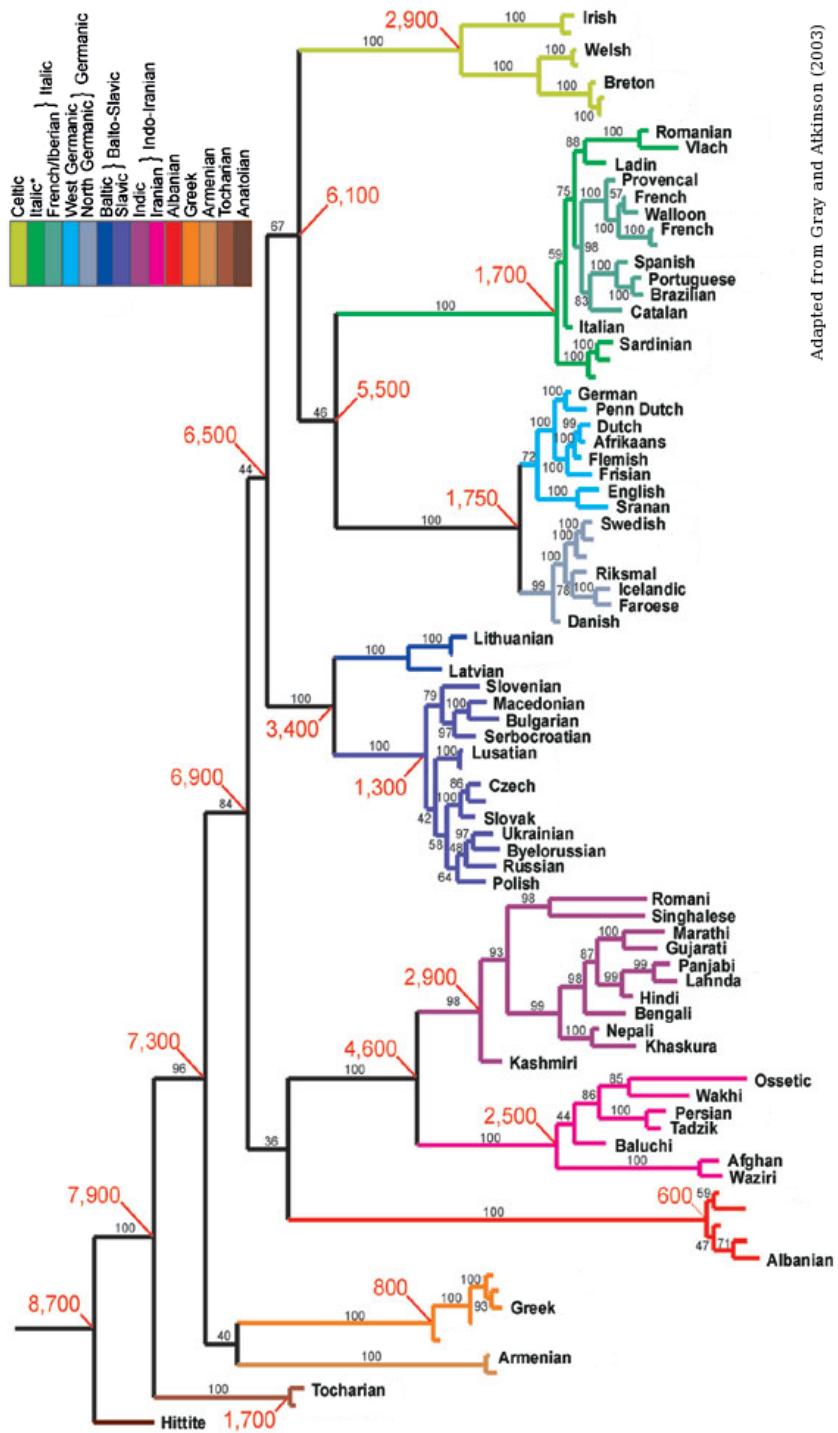
Adapted from Gray and Atkinson (2003)

Linguistic features of Latvian

- *Eastern Baltic language*
- *Inflected (synthetic) language*
- *Fixed initial stress*
- *2 genders*
- *No articles*
- *Relatively free word order*
- *Declensions – 7 cases*
- *6 different participles*

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Baltic v. Finno-Ugric languages

Baltic languages (Indo-European language family)	Finno-Ugric language family (examples of languages)
Latvian (1.7 million speakers)	Estonian (1.1 million)
Lithuanian (3.15 million)	Finnish (5.4 million)
Old Prussian† - extinct	Hungarian (13 million)
	Livonian* (40)

† The 3rd Baltic language spoken in the region of Kaliningrad (Königsberg/ lv. Karalaučì), extinct in the early 18th century

* A Finno-Ugric minority language spoken in Latvia, almost extinct

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Influences from Finno-Ugric and other Baltic languages

From Livonian and Estonian:

- Stress on the first syllable
- Maritime terminology (laiva = boat, liedags = beach)

Loan words from Lithuanian:

ģimene = family, kareivis = soldier

From Old Prussian:

ķermenis = body, Körper

Important milestones

1685-1689 – translation of the Old and New Testament into Latvian by Ernst Glück, a German pastor

1879 – the first Latvian novel "Mērnieku laiki" (The Time of Land Surveyors)

1894 – "Latvju dainas" (collection of traditional folk songs, usually in 4 lines)

"Latvju dainas"

- UNESCO World heritage
- oral tradition, transmitted in generations for more than 1000 years
- about 1.2 million folk songs, usually consisting of 4 lines in trochaic or dactylic metre
- ancient roots, archaic mythological patterns related to Proto-Indo-European

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Recent history

1914 to 1918 – WW1

1917 – revolution in Russia

1918 – Latvia declares independence, 1st Republic

1939 – WW2 begins

1940 – Latvia occupied by Soviet forces

1941 to 1944 – German occupation

1945 – end of WW2; Latvia remains incorporated in the USSR

1990 – restoration of independence, 2nd Republic

2004 – membership in the EU and NATO

2014 – introduction of euro

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Official Language Law of Latvia, 1999

Section 3

(1) The official language in the Republic of Latvia is the **Latvian language.**

(3) The State shall ensure the development and use of **the Latvian sign language** for communication with people with impaired hearing.

(4) The State shall ensure the maintenance, protection and development of the **Latgalian written language** as a historic variant of the Latvian language.

Section 4

The State shall ensure the maintenance, protection and development of the **Liv [Livonian] language** as the language of the indigenous (autochthon) population.

2012 - referendum

- Goal: to recognize the status of Russian as another official language in Latvia

- Participation: 71% of entitled voters (Latvian citizens)

- Outcome: 75% voted against

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Other autochthonous languages – 1

Latgalian

- Native speakers: 165 000
- Different writing, different pronunciation
- A language or a dialect?
- Rich literature
- Tonal accents – falling and broken

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Other autochthonous languages - 2
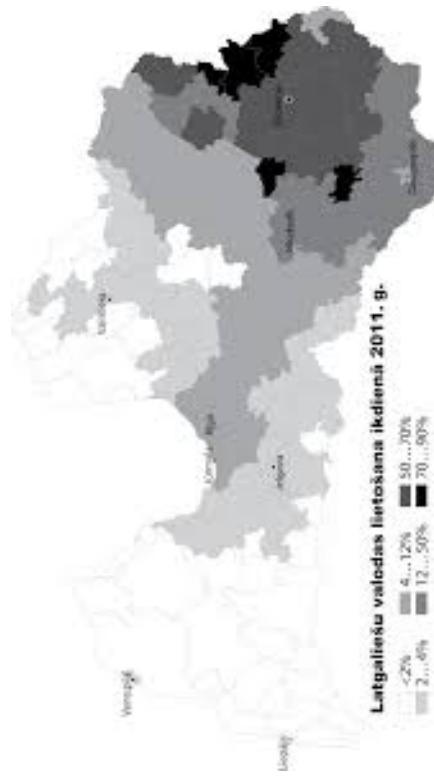
Livonian

- Spoken by app. 40 persons, no native speakers
- Poetry (Valts Ernštreits)
- Livonian Coast - a tourism area building on its own identity

Terminological Case Studies –
Riga versus Brussels

IATE: public multilingual termbase

iate.europa.eu

Latvian IATE

- 40 641 Latvian terms developed by the EU institutions since 2004

- 3600 Latvian terms were fed into IATE in 2017

Terminology development

Influence of other languages:

- Beginning of 20th century – German
- From 1945 to 1990 – Russian
- From 1990 onwards – English

Purism – very popular in 1990ies and in the beginning of 21st century, now declining

Case study No 1 - euro

Problem:
In Latvian, the vowels E and U do not associate with each other. The diphthong EI is used instead.

Europe = Eiropa
Eurovision = Eirovīzija

Case study No 1 – euro

2002 - the Terminology Commission of the Latvian Academy of Sciences (TC LAS) decides to translate euro as:

eira – a flexive feminine noun

The decision is not supported by the society who prefers the form "eiro" (non-flexive masculine noun).

2005 – the government decides to call the new currency "**eiro**". Thus a new opinion of TC LAS is issued in favour of "eiro", in order to prevent the form "**euro**" being imposed by the European institutions.

The European Central Bank doesn't accept any deviations.

Case study No 1 - euro

Result:

- In the official and legal texts the authentic form "euro" is used.
- The society and media use the adapted form "eiro" (in everyday speech, newspapers and internet content).

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Case study No 1 - euro

Consequences for translation in the Latvian department of DGT: differentiation

- euro – in legislative proposals, reports etc.

- eiro – in texts for broad public, such as brochures and web content

eurozone – eurozona / eirozona

Eurostat – Eurostat (original form preserved); *Europol* - Eiropols

Case study No 2 – Citizens' dialogue

An event hosting public debates with high level decision makers of the Commission about the future of Europe, held in Member States

Legal basis COM(2014) 173 – translated as "**pilsoņu dialogs**" (direct translation from English; dialogue of citizens)

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Case study No 2 – Citizens' dialogue

Problem: politically sensible

The word "citizen" has specific connotations in Latvia, dating back from 1990ies.

After independence, the Soviet migrant workers didn't obtain the citizenship automatically; instead, they were asked to naturalise.

The distinction between citizens and non-citizens is used by some political forces to create distrust and polarity between ethnic groups.

Case study No 2 – Citizens' dialogue

All the non-citizens are nevertheless Latvian nationals and enjoy the rights provided by the EU citizenship. However, they cannot participate in the national parliament elections.

State of play: 240 000 non-citizens in Latvia (2017)

Case study No 2 – Citizens' dialogue

2015: Latvian presidency in the Council of the EU

Commission's representation in Riga decides to use a different translation:

- avoiding the sensitive word "citizens"
- stressing the dialogue WITH people, not AMONG them

dialogs ar iedzīvotājiem = dialogue with inhabitants

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Case study No 2 – Citizens' dialogue

The Riga approach was taken over in DGT translations for public, but wasn't included in the EU institutions' termbase IATE.

2018: a new discussion within the linguistic group of Latvian translation department of the European Commission

Goal: to find a precise, non-generic term, reflecting the substance of the event

Trend: after 25 years, the negative connotations are disappearing

Outcome: pilsoņdialogs

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Case study No 3 – offshore

Context: offshore industries and technologies, e.g. offshore wind farms situated in the sea

Goal: to find a term different from offshore companies

Outcome: **atkraste** (created by Commission's translators; declared Word of the Year 2015 in Latvia)

Conclusions

(1) The EU official language status has been particularly beneficial for Latvian terminology development.

(2) Nevertheless, situations may arise when the same notion is expressed differently in the Latvian national legislation (or public media) and in the EU institutions.

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Conclusions

Reasons:

- *different legal bases*
- *cultural and political background*
- *disparities in the semantic coverage of a term in a Latvian versus EU context.*

Conclusions

(3) Reconciling this can best be achieved by consultations and an open dialogue between the translation services of the EU institutions and the national authorities and linguistic experts.

However, since certain types of translated legislation are directly applicable in all member states, compromises have to be made in order to ensure legal certainty across the EU as a whole.

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Thank you!

Hartelijk dank!

Ďakujeme vám veľmi pekne!

Tack så mycket!

¡Muchas gracias!

Muito obrigado!

Go raibh maith agaibh!

Mulţumesc!

Σας ευχαριστούμε πολύ!

Vielen Dank!

Mockrát děkujeme!

Liels paldies!

Kiitos!

Nuoširdžiai dėkojame!

Merci beaucoup !

Suur tänu!

Grazie mille!

Najlepša hvala!

Dziękujemy za uwagę!

Благодаря!

Nirringrazzjawk ħafna!

Mange tak!

Hvala lijepa!

Köszönjük szépen!

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