

## ASETRAD STATEMENT ON EU TENDER TRAD19

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) recently announced a new tender, TRAD19, for the next 4 years.

**The DGT, one of the world's primary translation services**, is responsible for translating around two million pages (**around six hundred million words**) yearly, 30 % of which are presently outsourced. Those numbers afford it considerable weight in the institutional translation market. Up to now, the DGT used a system of dynamic lists to award translation work, breaking language combinations down into smaller lots to allow for participation by a number of service providers (SPs). Under those arrangements freelance translators had a real, albeit limited, presence as contractors.

In this new tender, however, the DGT has replaced dynamic lists with a system whereby the **entire volume outsourced in a given language combination, which includes translation, revision and review, will be awarded to a single SP** (the highest ranking of a total of five selected). By way of indication only, the minimum annual capacity required ranges from 78 k words in EL-FR to 9.9 m in EN-FR, with 7.8 M in EN-DE, 6 M in EN-IT, 5.5 M in EN-PT and 5 M in EN-ES. Although the DGT contends that freelancers can participate by submitting joint tenders, the volume and complexity of the service involved imposes two-tiered contracting, effectively barring them from opting for that procedure.

In a more positive light, the new specifications establish a **quality:price ratio of 70:30 in the selection criteria** and substantial penalties for delivering poor quality during the life of the contract. The scheme is significantly weakened, however, by **the absence of mechanisms for accrediting translators, ensuring traceability, conducting follow-through** to determine who actually does the translating or systematically monitoring changes in subcontractors. The highest ranked tenderer may be replaced by the second SP selected, the latter by the third and so on, but only *a posteriori* in the event of failure to meet certain quality requirements.

Although that 'cascading' approach differs substantially from domestic tenders such as routinely applied in police and court interpreting and translating in some EU countries, Spain and the United Kingdom for instance, it may lead to an identical end result. The exclusion **of freelancers and small companies from the tender for all practical intents and purposes**, along with the shortcomings in the quality control scheme and the concentration of orders in a single awardee, severely distorts the marketplace and expels the most highly qualified professionals from institutional translation in Europe.

We at Asetrad believe that a scheme based on a contracting platform and dynamic lists with translator and revisor traceability, individual accreditation for each subcontractor and evaluation linked to subcontractors rather than to the general contractor would be much better suited to our sector. Such an approach, in place in other institutions, European Parliament among them, would

allow for disintermediation and ensure fairer treatment of each translator's qualifications, performance and experience.

We are keenly aware and have been relentlessly reminded of the DGT's want of resources. We nonetheless deem that such paucity scantily excuses the shortcomings in this new scheme and feel the DGT should make an effort in that regard. The European Union accounts for a substantial share of institutional translation market demand. Many freelance translators and revisors depend exclusively on its custom but have absolutely no way to improve their lot or seek more equitable conditions. Holding market power (particularly where derived from public funding) entails the acceptance of moral responsibilities of the same magnitude, which would include **seeking to ensure a balanced market with a level bargaining field** based on objective criteria and eschewing the concentration of power in fewer and fewer hands. In our view this tender is a step in the opposite direction. Despite this 4-year setback, we can only hope that today's reflections on tomorrow's conditions will contribute to a more equitable marketplace for the next tender.

Indisputably, **higher supply-side quality is contingent upon paying greater heed to the link in the chain on which it ultimately depends:** the professionals who carry out the work.

Asetrad has prepared an exhaustive analysis of the tender (in Spanish) that can be downloaded [here](#).