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**Feasibility Study for Actions to Support
the Mobility of Literary Translators**

Executive Summary

This study was requested by the European Commission, Directorate General Education and Culture

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1. Purpose of the feasibility study

The study takes as its starting point the key role of:

- Translation in European society: from the formal institutional structures level to the facilitation of common European identity and intercultural dialogue, thus in the entire process of European integration. Key role, which has been endorsed by the Council in the second work plan for the period 2011-2014 to contribute to the implementation of the “European Agenda for culture” with priority areas such as cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and accessible and inclusive culture; skills and mobility, cultural heritage. Furthermore, in accordance with the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which is part of the *acquis communautaire*, the enhancement of the literary translation sector is a way to facilitate the promotion and safeguard cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Mobility for cultural activities. Mobility is the essence of literary translation activity. The tangible interaction of cultures, the sharing of ideas and values and the understanding that emerges from this is central to the flowering of culture within Europe. For translators contact with the source language and culture and with colleagues translating from the same languages is crucial. Translators may act as cultural mediators in the peculiar process of literary translation: “piquing curiosity and transfer knowledge” (CEATL, 2008). For Europe literary translation is not just any art form, but is the art that promotes and facilitates European cultural unity.

Starting from this assumptions, the Directorate General Education and Culture of the European Commission decided to commission an exploratory study to provide critical information to design a system action to support mobility and training of literary translators, to gather relevant information on best practices and all other useful elements that can guide the policy and future activities of the Commission in this field. The study has been aimed to assess the feasibility and desirability of launching a mobility scheme for literary translators, by evaluating its underlying intervention logic through consultations with the envisaged key players; it is to elaborate a system of mobility grants including details on the actions and funding framework.

2. Methodology

A mixed approach has been developed, putting together **desk research** - literature review and data collection - with **field research** – a questionnaire interviews and case studies workshop and **assessing the achieved results** – the intervention logic - against the operational realities of the literary translation field. Beginning with an initial review of the literature relating to the literary translation environment and mobility of translators, as well as with the identification of the key actors of the sector, the study team implemented a field work based on a questionnaire and interviews to the 4 main categories of stakeholders: individual translators, residence centres, publishers and universities. Also a review of existing practices and mobility schemes at local and national level has been carried out. The main findings have than be discussed with key representatives of the sector during a face-to-face workshop held in December 2011 and several other virtual meeting have been held in order to assess the proposed intervention logic against operational realities. Sustained interaction with people and organisations involved in the translation sector was central to the working approach.

3. Needs of literary translators

Two different categories of needs are addressed and affected by mobility actions:

The sectoral one: the working environment and context

- **The organisation of work:** literary translators have more than one occupation and work under pressure: when in residence, they take a distance from everyday life and constraints, and can concentrate only on their work, with a consequent by far better quality of the work.
- **Working time and work-life balance:** Literary translators make a living under the conditions imposed on them by the ‘market’; in many countries their situation is quite difficult.

The individual one: the professional development.

- **Training, skills and competencies** – Individual translators feel very strongly the necessity to have a deeper training, even thanks to the possibility to exchange opinions/ideas/techniques with other colleagues, to confront new techniques, theories and experimenting new methodologies. They feel the lack of information and suffer the isolation they are used to work,
- **Stay in the source language country** – Due to low incomes respect to the time necessary to produce a high quality work, it’s difficult for a literary translator to spend a period of time in the source language aimed to experience daily life, to get in touch with the socio-cultural aspects of the country, with writers and the publishing market of the place, as well as to achieve the real comprehension of the language, of what is said and unsaid, what is suggested and what changes in the communication codes of two different cultures.

But, actually, all this lies at the basis of the translation work and in a specific way of literary translation and represents the fundamental informal training a good translator needs.

Translation is a complex, multilevel process for which the knowledge of the source/target languages is not sufficient. A Mobility system can cope with all these difficulties and requirements by inserting translators in a socio-cultural context, where he/she can confront work techniques, theories, problem solving solutions through an ever-greater development and growth of competencies and skills - in short of his/her professionalization. Besides that, improvement of literary translators skills and competencies will contribute to the competitiveness of the European cultural sectors through higher quality works, and also by promoting mobility to encourage more translation of under-represented languages into more dominant ones. In the long-term, this will help addressing market limit of transnational activities, helping to address geographical imbalances, while promoting cultural and linguistic diversity.

4. Assessing the feasibility of the EU mobility schemes for literary translators

Based on the analysis carried out the study concludes that a system of mobility grants for literary translator is feasible, and could potentially contribute (albeit to a varying extent depending on the medium and long term perspectives) to achieve all the objectives that have been set. Especially considering the financial limitations experimented by the literary translation sector, ad hoc initiatives supporting their mobility facilitate the systematization of practices, their integration with national initiatives and provide an opportunity for capacity building of the sector to manage mobility and to engage in transnational networking. On the basis of the research and field-work, a typology of mobility scheme was developed that comprises 4 main types of actions. These are:

A.1- Lifelong Training - Mobility for expertise training

A.2- Initial training with apprenticeship option - Mobility training for beginners

A.3- Mobility for translators with a translation project or a concrete project about acquiring new literary experiences, skills and know-how

B. Partnerships: Mobility for capacity building and networking activity

C. Mobility side activities

In addition to distinguishing various types of mobility schemes addressing the various needs of the sector, the study identifies seven five objectives: 1-Encourage European Cultural unity and integration; 2-Develop the European literary translation space; 3-Enrich translators' literary know-how, linguistic/cultural proficiency and their familiarity with a relevant country; 4- Enhance the capacity building of the sector to support mobility and to operate transnationally; 5- Promote of literary translators as cultural mediators; 6- Promote and facilitate mobility for literary translators from different countries and circulation of works.

The fieldwork suggested that in many countries, mobility for translators is a tool to promote the culture of the country abroad and to export culture. Another result indicates the existence of schemes aimed at promoting networking activities and professional enhancement of the translators. The field-work revealed also unbalances between demand for and supply of mobility: mobility funds are insufficient to cover the full range of expenses associated with a mobility experience. There is a significant imbalance in the number of schemes between countries, regions, sources and target languages. The share of sources languages in total translation production is: the stronger the position of a source language is, the more translation will be made of it. Rectifying the balance could be encouraged in the spirit the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the EU mobility scheme for literary translator could be an effective tool.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

- Capitalising on and integrating the EU mobility scheme with the existing ones and maintaining the plurality of stakeholders currently involved in the field
- Considering mobility as an integral part of the education and training of the literary translators
- Building the EU programme on the cultural diversity approach, so to address and rectifying current imbalances
- Including capacity building to enhance mobility management and monitoring of project promoters as a key action of the programme towards a more effective mobility
- Promoting actions offering additional and complementary support to the mobility experiences such as workshops and conferences
- Facilitating sustainability through partnership, networking activities and feasibility visit to explore or prepare for a potential transnational project.