

# NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Daniel Sherr

## BUMPY ROAD FOR TRANSLATORS IN BUENOS AIRES

You're in Buenos Aires and you need a court interpreter for a deposition or trial. Under Argentinian law, you need a certified public translator, an Argentine citizen with a university degree in translation who is registered with the local colegio, or professional association.

Buenos Aires is host to the country's largest association of certified public translators, the Colegio de Traductores Públicos de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires (CTPCBA), with approximately 3,500 active members working in 34 different languages. The CTPCBA may be familiar to NAJIT members because it has hosted three Latin American congresses on translation and interpretation.

Despite its large membership and substantial income from certification and authentication fees, the Colegio is currently running a deficit. The causes are numerous. According to the 2000-2001 annual report, approximately 1,500 members failed to pay the yearly membership fee of \$42 (now \$50). The Colegio made a substantial investment in new headquarters, but the building needed renovations. The maintenance of the current headquarters and the new space has strained the organization's budget. The Colegio has also lost various lawsuits and failed to pay its legal fees. One of its bank accounts was attached. The most recent Conference on Translation and Interpretation ran a \$70,000 deficit. The Colegio cannot, however, simply shut down; its existence is mandated by law.

In the meantime, the financial crisis in Argentina has decimated translators' purchasing power. At three Argentine pesos to the dollar (until last December, there was a one-to-one parity between the peso and the dollar), says Miriam Golfa, President of the ATIBA (Association of Certified Public Translators and Interpreters of the Province of Buenos Aires), "We have no choice but to work more to earn less."

## E.U. EXPANSION: MORE LANGUAGE COMBINATIONS

In 2003, the European Union is expected to approve membership applications of ten new countries, mainly from Eastern Europe. While the enlargement entails serious political and financial challenges, as Chris Morris pointed out in a December 2001 report for the World Service of the BBC, it will pose substantial language problems as well.

"At the European Commission, a succession of politi-

cians and officials and officials have a mission to explain the often confusing world of Euro-policy. For the outsider, it's puzzling enough in just one language, but twiddle a dial by the side of your seat and you start to understand who really keeps this place ticking over," observed Morris, paying tribute to the EU's interpreters.

Now, more than ever, translators and interpreters have their ears and computers full. There are currently more than 100 possible language combinations in the EU, and, according to Morris, "within a few years, there could be more than 600." In 2003 alone, when Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic are expected to join, the number of possible language combinations will jump from 110 to 182. Sometimes interpreters have to resort to relays, which can lead to greater inaccuracy. (If no one in the English booth interprets directly from Greek into English, the English interpreters would wait for the Greek to French interpretation from the French booth in order to provide the English version.)

On the translation side, according to the web page of the Translation Service of the European Commission, translators render over 1,200,000 pages a year. ("This is the equivalent of a tower of paper more than 100 meters high, which grows by another 10% every year or every time a new language is added.") To cope with the ever-growing volume of translations, the EU is increasingly relying on EC-SYSTRAN, a computer-based translation system available commercially that has been customized to meet the translation needs of the European Commission. The system, which can process 2000 pages an hour, is only an aid and no one claims that it produces print-ready copy. (It recently translated "vice president" into Spanish as "president of vice.") According to Angelique Petrits of the Translation Service, "The quality will never reach human levels." For the moment, the software is capable of handling only 18 language combinations.

No country wants to renounce its linguistic sovereignty, although the Maltese have generously agreed to forego official status for their language. Still, says European Commission Vice President Neil Kinnock, "What's essential is that the right of every member state to use its language has got to be sustained, and there's got to be a recognition of the list of official languages and the complete honoring of the right of a European citizen to communicate in his language of choice and to

get a reply in that language."

In 2001, when the European Commission moved towards what the BBC termed "bureaucratic reform," the French and the Germans "detected a plot to secure the supremacy of English by stealth." Whether the result of a surreptitious plan or a mere fait accompli, the de facto language of communication is increasingly English. A decade ago, most EU documents were drafted in French. Now, says the BBC, "nearly two-thirds are in English."

In the meantime, though, most states zealously preserve their right to make their case in their national language. English-Estonian? Portuguese-Slovenian? Greek-Latvian? If you are a translator or interpreter with these language combinations, Brussels or Luxembourg may be the place for you.

*[Daniel Sherr is a conference interpreter and federally certified court interpreter.]*

## Legal Codes of Four Latin-American Nations on the Web

Allan F. Amaya

we had access to primary or secondary source material that would help us to see terms or expressions in context. Specialized dictionaries may thoroughly define these terms, but often do not provide examples of the proper context in which to apply them.

For example, when translating an order of extradition to be submitted to a sovereign nation to demand the return of a fugitive accused of a crime, wouldn't it be useful to have access to the penal code of that nation in order to track the corresponding terms habitually used in extradition matters of that nation?

Imagine my delight when through recent research I found the web site of the Supreme Court of Justice of the Dominican Republic, with links to the country's civil and penal codes as well procedural laws. Few web sites of foreign nations catalog their codes as thoroughly as has been done here. Of course, if it were only a catalog of laws, the web site would be of limited use, but the web page also contains links to the actual text of the codes.

Start your consultation on [www.suprema.gov.do](http://www.suprema.gov.do). Go to the drop-down list on the right, click "consulta" and you will see a list of links. Click on "consulta constitución y códigos." A page will appear that is divided in two. On the left is a drop-down list of topics and on the right is a window where you would enter the code or article if you knew the specific number you were interested in. However, if you just click on "ejecutar" you will get a drop-down list of articles by subject and number for easy reference. For example, if you were looking for the civil procedure code, you would see all 1,040 articles listed by topic and number.

The web sites of Puerto Rico, Colombia, and Venezuela are also well-designed and available for consultation. They are, respectively:

<http://www.lexjuris.com/lexleyes.htm>

<http://www.leyesnet.com/Codigos.asp>

<http://comunidad.derecho.org/pantin/legis.html>

(The Venezuelan site even includes some tasteful background piano music!) I hope you will find these four reference sites as enjoyable and useful as I have. These sites, and others like them, provide ample justification for computers and Internet service to be provided to interpreters at their worksites. Regrettably, many courts have not yet understood that interpreters require access to specialized reference material, most of which is readily available on the internet. We hope this anti-computer bias will soon be a vestige of past administrations.

*[The author is a Spanish staff interpreter in Kings County Family Court, New York]*

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