



Press Kit

20 years since the accession of 10 States to the European Union: a new constitutional moment for Europe

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Overall Impact

Introduction

New accessions, a growing institution. The building of a common future for all European countries has been carried out in several stages, from the end of the Second World War to today. From six founding countries in 1957, the European Community, subsequently the European Union (EU), has gradually expanded step by step to reach 27 members today.

Of all the successive enlargements, that of 2004 was the largest. On 1 May 2004, the Union welcomed ten new Member States at once: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. The number of Member States thus increased from 15 to 25.

What was the impact of this major event on the judicial institution of the Union, more particularly with regard to its organisation and functioning, as well as its workload?

Organisation and Functioning

- 10 Judges were appointed to the Court of Justice, and 10 to the General Court ([Act concerning the conditions of accession of new Member States to the European Union](#)).
- The number of Advocates-General of the Court of Justice did not change in 2004, and remained fixed at 8. It was only in 2013 that the number of Advocates-General was increased to 11 (the Treaty provides that, at the request of the Court, the Council, acting unanimously, may increase the number of Advocates-General – in accordance with [Declaration No 38 annexed to the Treaty of Lisbon](#)).
- In order to enable the Court of Justice and the General Court to meet the challenges linked to enlargement, the Treaty of Nice introduced certain changes to support the integration of new Judges and to manage the extra workload:
 - Opinions of the Advocates-General are no longer always delivered in every case. Thus, where the Court considers that a case raises no new point of law, it may decide, after hearing the Advocate General, that the case will be determined without an Opinion.
 - A link was established between **the number of Member States and the number of Judges**. For the Court of Justice, the latter is equal to the number of Member States. For the General Court, it is *at least* equal to that number, paving the way for a potential increase in the number of its Judges.
 - **A Grand Chamber** was created, and the Statute fixed the number of Judges of the Grand Chamber at 13 (15 today). This formation, before which the most important disputes are brought, is presided over by the President of the Court and also includes the Vice-President.
 - The **distribution of jurisdiction between the Court of Justice and the General Court** was modified: the General Court now has jurisdiction to hear and

determine all direct actions at first instance, with the exception of certain specific actions.

- Jurisdiction is conferred on the General Court to hear and determine **questions referred for a preliminary ruling** in specific areas laid down by the Statute. This jurisdiction has not been implemented to date. However, in November 2022, the Court of Justice sent a legislative request to the European Parliament and to the Council with a view, first, to transfer to the General Court the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice to give preliminary rulings in six specific areas (Value Added Tax, excise duties, the C Code and the tariff classification of goods under the Combined Nomenclature, compensation and assistance to passengers, and the scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading) and, secondly, to expand the scope of the mechanism for determining whether an appeal against a decision of the General Court is allowed to proceed (which originally entered into force in May 2019).

- In terms of staff, **the number employed in the institution has increased** from 1010 (in 2000), to 1140 (in 2003) reaching 1641 (in 2004).

Year	2000	2003	2004	2005	2007	2010	2015	2020	2022	2023
Budgetary posts	1010	1140	1641	1743	1882	1927	1998	2073	2110	2 302

- The budget of the institution has also increased.

Year	2000	2003	2004	2005	2007	2010	2015	2020	2022	2023
Budget €m	131.3	150.6	235	229	272.2	329.3	357.1	436.6	464.8	486

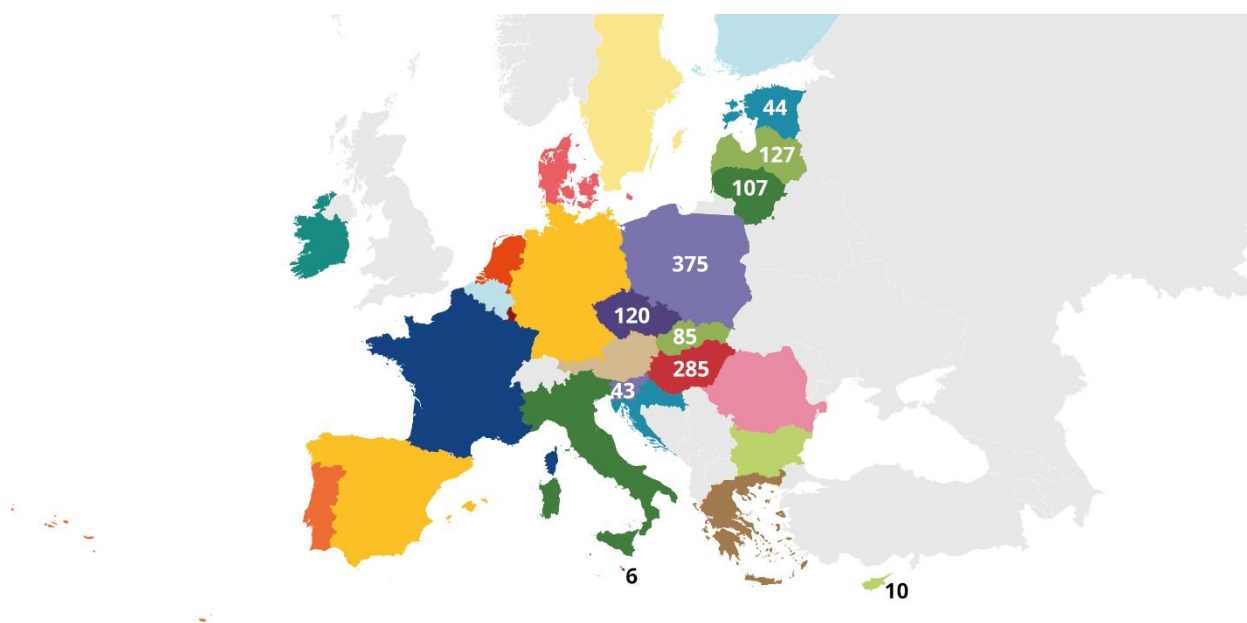
Pre-accession Case-Law

In the context of the 2004 accession, the institution selected an initial list of 57 judgments from 1954 to 2000, initially translated and revised by national translation centres and finalised by the Court's language units (https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/jo2_14955/en/).

Litigation and Workload

- The contribution of the Member States which acceded in 2004 to constructing a European legal system was significant: from 1 May 2004 to 31 March 2024, a total of **1202** references for a preliminary ruling were submitted by the courts and tribunals of the ten acceding Member States.

- The first questions for a preliminary ruling were submitted as early as 2004 (2 cases referred by Hungary).
- The number of references remained relatively low during the first years (fewer than 10 in 2006). It then increased significantly (20 in 2008, 45 in 2011, 65 in 2014, 103 in 2020), before stabilising at its current level (120 in 2023).

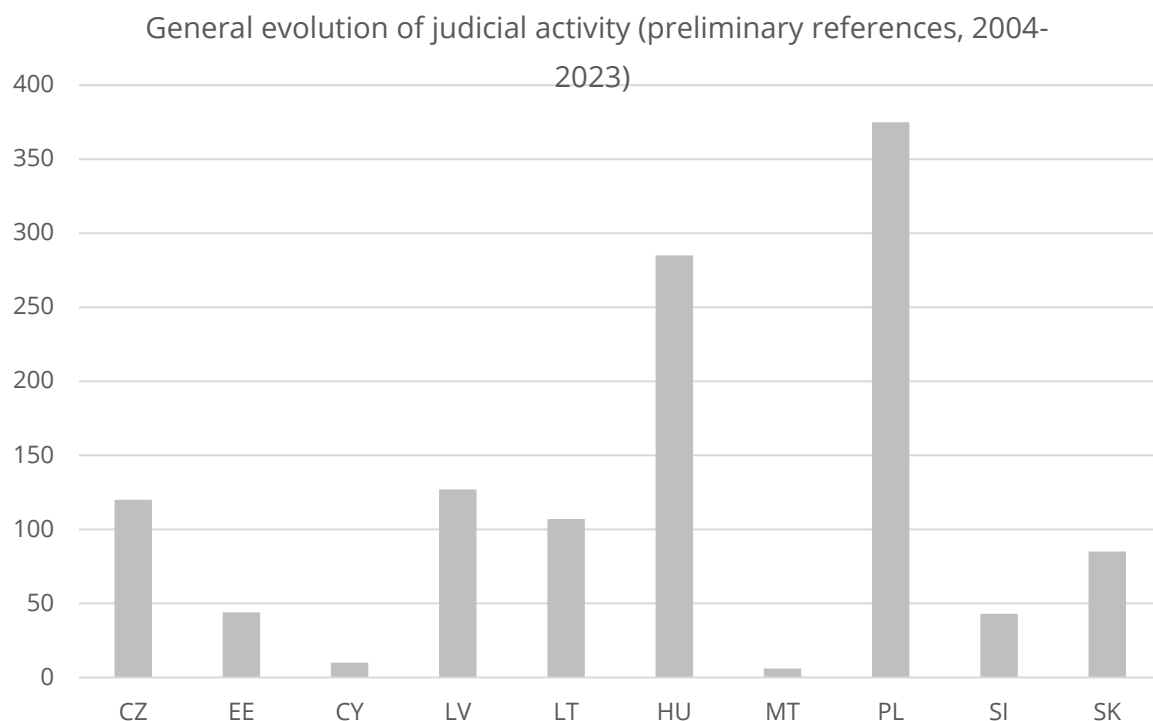


General Evolution of Judicial Activity (preliminary references) (2004-2024 ¹)

Years	Czech Republic	Estonia	Cyprus	Latvia	Lithuania	Hungary	Malta	Poland	Slovenia	Slovakia
2004	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
2005	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	0	0
2006	3	0	0	0	1	4	0	2	0	1
2007	2	2	0	0	1	2	0	7	0	1
2008	1	2	1	3	3	6	0	4	0	0
2009	5	2	1	4	3	10	1	10	2	1
2010	3	0	0	3	2	6	0	8	1	5
2011	5	1	0	10	1	13	0	11	1	3
2012	7	5	0	5	2	18	1	6	0	9
2013	7	3	3	5	10	20	0	11	1	4
2014	6	0	2	7	6	23	0	14	4	3
2015	8	2	0	9	8	14	0	15	5	5
2016	5	1	0	9	8	15	1	19	3	6
2017	4	7	0	5	10	22	0	19	3	6
2018	12	2	1	5	6	29	0	31	2	6
2019	5	3	1	12	7	20	1	39	5	10
2020	9	3	0	17	7	18	0	41	2	6

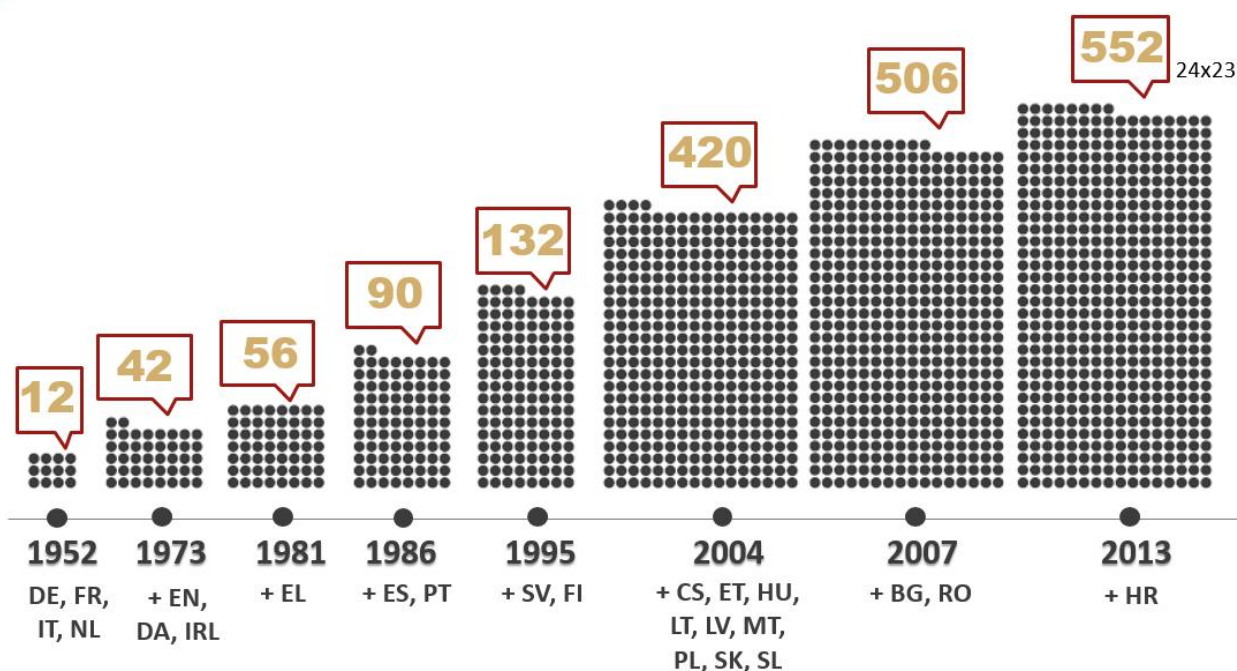
¹ 31 March 2024

2021	8	2	0	12	15	17	0	34	7	2
2022	13	4	0	4	6	20	0	39	0	7
2023	12	4	1	15	6	18	2	48	6	8
2024	4	1	0	2	5	5	0	16	1	2
Total	120	44	10	127	107	285	6	375	43	85



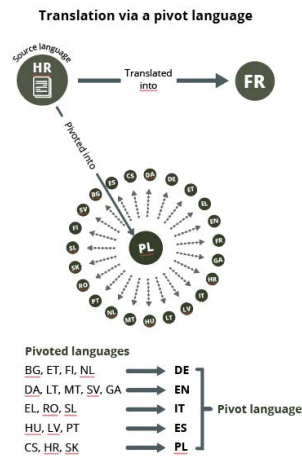
- The 2004 enlargement also had a significant impact on **the rules governing the language arrangements** applicable at the Court of Justice of the European Union.
- While the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) had four official languages when it was created in 1952, successive enlargements have increased that number: 7 official languages in 1974, 8 in 1981, 10 in 1986, 12 in 1995 and **a total of 21 official languages in 2004**. Subsequent enlargements have brought this number to 24 official languages today.
- Cases may be brought and pleaded before the Court of Justice and the General Court in each of the 24 official languages and, unless a derogation applies, the decisions adopted by the two courts are accessible in the 24 languages. This is the principle of full multilingualism.
- *"The Court shall set up a language service staffed by experts with adequate legal training and thorough knowledge of several official languages of the European Union."* (Article 42 of the Rules of Procedure of the Court of Justice).
- This increase in the number of official languages has given rise to a sharp increase in the number of language combinations: from 12 in 1952 to 420 in 2004 (552 today).

Language Combinations



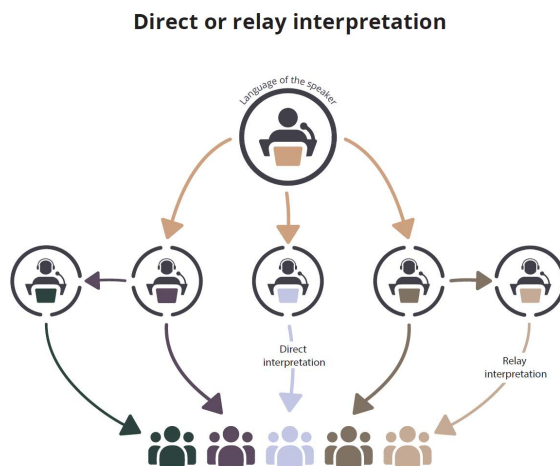
- In particular, after the 2004 enlargement, the Court of Justice and the General Court have progressively put in place a series of measures aimed at increasing efficiency and containing the workload in the field of translation. They have thus re-evaluated their practice of publishing judgments and orders (selective publication). In the same vein, the length of documents to be translated has been reduced and the report for the hearing at the Court of Justice has been dispensed with. Furthermore, since 2013, the General Court has been able to decide to publish a judgment in its entirety only in the language of the case and to provide extracts in the other languages, reproducing only those paragraphs of the judgment that it considers appropriate to publish. In 2014, a 40% reduction in the translation workload was thus realised.
- Another measure adopted in anticipation of the 2004 enlargement was the introduction of a translation system via so-called 'pivot' languages, alongside direct translation from the original language. To deal with the multiplication of language combinations linked to the increase in the number of official languages, it was decided, where it is not possible to provide a direct translation, to translate via English, German, Italian, Spanish and, since 2019, Polish. These languages are called 'pivot languages' because it is into one of these five languages that texts written in all the other languages (called 'pivoted languages') are translated, according to predetermined combinations, before being translated into the required languages, according to the below diagram. Given the particular role of French (the language of deliberations in proceedings), translations from French into all other languages are always direct translations. The French language translation unit, for its part, covers all the official languages of the European Union.

[INFOGRAPHIC 'Translation via pivot languages']



As for interpreters, in order to ensure that interpretation is always available, even for language combinations which are less common, interpreters increasingly make use of 'relay' and 'retour' interpretation techniques. In the case of the former, the language of the speaker is not interpreted directly, but rather via interpretation provided by another interpreter; in the latter, the interpretation of the speaker is entrusted to an interpreter with the same native language as the speaker who is able to interpret the speech into another language.

[INFOGRAPHIC 'Direct interpretation or by relay language']



The Buildings

As regards the buildings, the 2004 enlargement was accompanied by the extension and renovation of the *Palais* that the Court of Justice has occupied in Luxembourg since 1972 on the Kirchberg plateau (see history of the buildings: https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/p1_3943801).