# What time is it in Europe?

ARIZONA

## DIPLOMACY OF LEGAL TRANSLATIONS: GMT v. UTC



Paul Gabor, Wed 29 May 2013

# Plan

stimulated by: Seago, Seidelmann, Allen, *Legislative Specifications for Coordinating with Universal Time,* Exton

Concerning Europe...

European corps of texts

- volume

- inertia, errors and corrections

- two legal traditions

European corps of translators and their tools

Translations and their quality

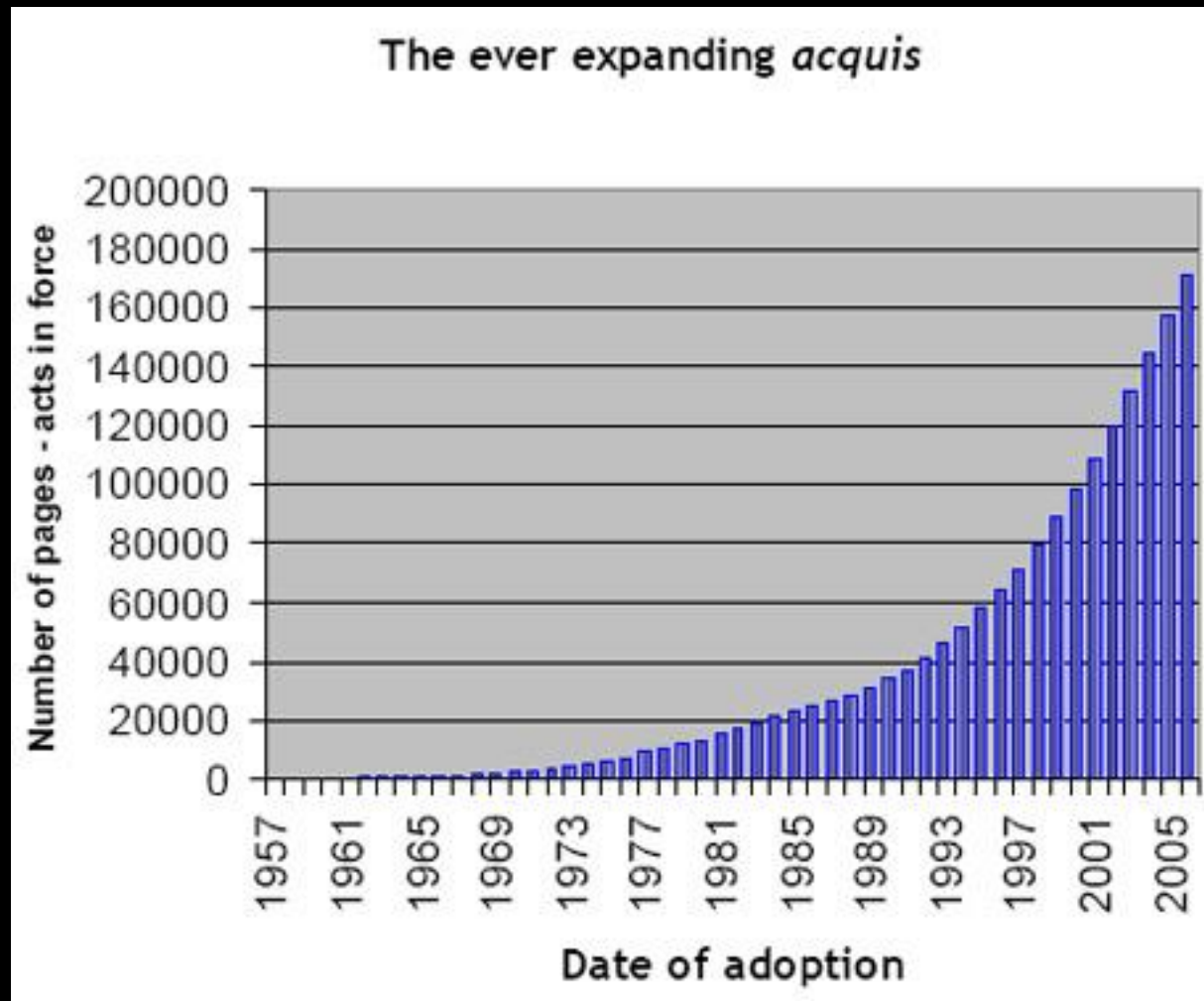What time is it in Europe? GMT v. UTC: lost in translation?

Future? Action?

# Acquis Communautaire

= body of EU law (treaties, laws, legal acts, court decisions)



The ever expanding *acquis*

# Acquis Communautaire

~200,000 pages in currently in force  x  23 languages

~750,000 total

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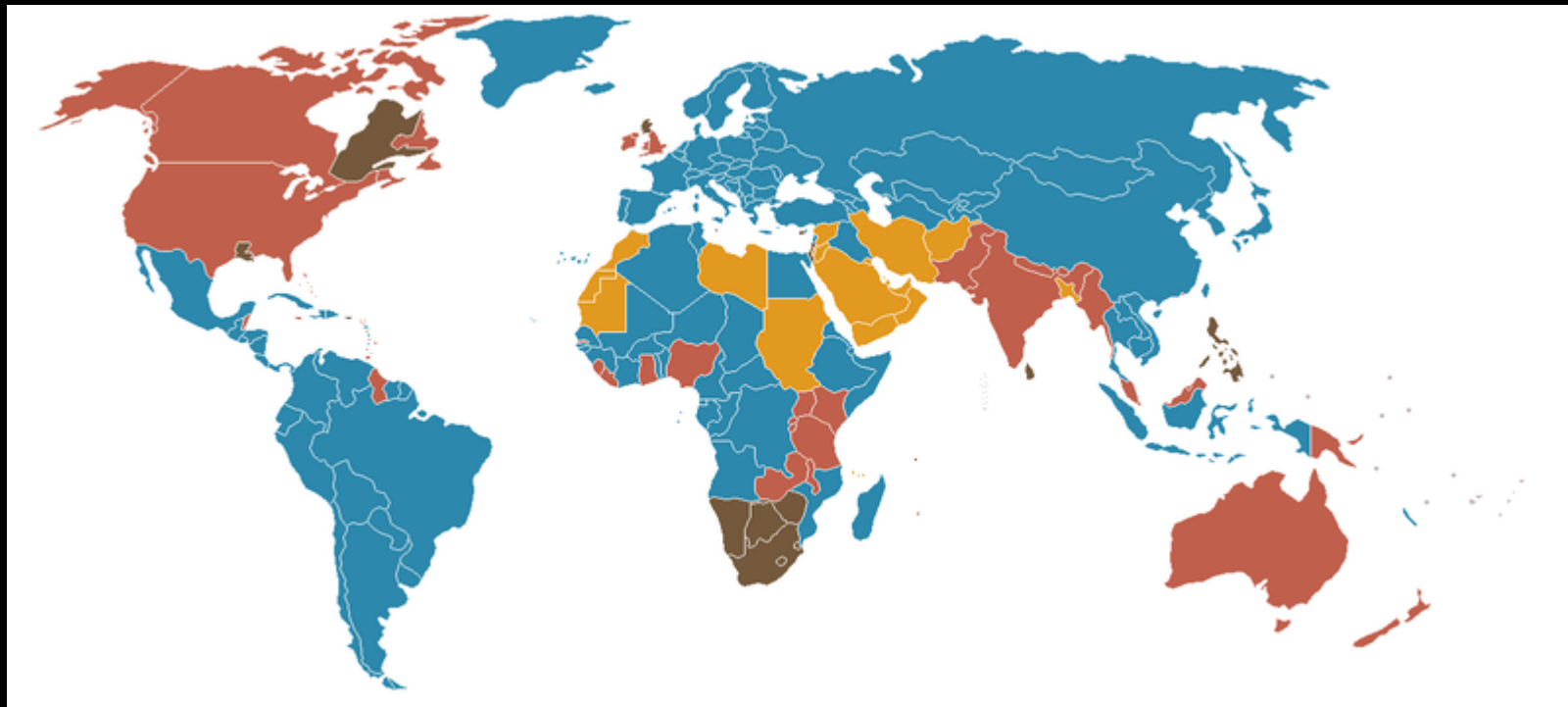~750,000 total

=> **Massive inertia**

# Acquis Communautaire

propagation of errors and of corrections

Seago, Seidelmann, Allen focus on English legal tradition

The French legal tradition deals with inaccuracies differently

# Acquis Communautaire

Seago, Seidelmann, Allen:

"Official time or regulatory time is a realization of a legal time by a sovereign authority in order to satisfy public expectations for civil time based on historical, philosophical, religious, or technological prejudices, precedents, and requirements."

# Acquis Communautaire

Seago, Seidelmann, Allen:

"Official time or regulatory time is a realization of a legal time by a sovereign authority in order to satisfy public expectations for civil time based on historical, philosophical, religious, or technological prejudices, precedents, and requirements."

NB. In the French tradition the authority is irreducible; it exists *a priori,* not requiring any "social contract" to legitimize it.  (I think that both philosophies are correct.)

NB. In the French tradition, legal and administrative discontinuity is admissible. Thus, EU often regulates with no regard to precedent (or other considerations).

# Translation Tools

* Inter institutional data base

"Inter Active Terminology for Europe"

** started in 1999,

** launched 2004,

** made public 2007

8.4 million terms, including

* 540,000 abbreviations

* 130,000 phrases

* all 23 languages

# Translations

| one concept: two equivalent expressions | semantic equivalent (literal translation) | factual equivalent (possible functional transl.) |
|---|---|---|
| natural number | *nombre naturel* | *entier positif* |
| positive integer | *entier positif* | *nombre naturel* |

Generally, a good translation maintains semantic equivalence whenever possible.
This objective has to be abandoned frequently.

| one concept: two equivalent expressions | semantic equivalent (literal translation) | factual equivalent (possible functional transl.) |
|---|---|---|
| steering wheel | *roue de boeuf* | *volant (directionnel)* |
| *volant (directionnel)* | (directional) flier | steering wheel |

Strange things can happen when the semantic equivalent is incorrect factually.

# Translations

| concept | semantic equivalents (literal translations) | factual equivalent (functional transl.) |
|---|---|---|
| *temps universel* | allgemeine Zeit, Weltzeit | Weltzeit |

For a linguist, usage is the ultimate arbiter.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| BG | Bulgarian | *по Гринуич* | Greenwich time |
| EL | Greek | *ώρα Γκρίνουιτς* | Greenwich time |
| EN | English | Greenwich Mean Time | Greenwich mean time |
| ET | Estonian | *Greenwichi aja järgi* | Greenwich mean time |
| LT | Lithuanian | *nakties* GMT *laiku* | Greenwich mean time |
| LV | Latvian | *pēc Grīnvičas laika* | Greenwich mean time |
| HU | Hungarian | *greenwich-i idő* | Greenwich mean time |
| MT | Maltese | Greenwich Mean Time | Greenwich mean time |
| SK | Slovakian | *greenwichského času* | Greenwich mean time |
| SV | Swedish | *Greenwichtid* (Greenwich Mean Time, GMT) | Greenwich time (Greenwich Mean Time, GMT) |
| FI | Finnish | (GMT) | (GMT) |
| CS | Czech | *světového času* (GMT) | universal time (GMT) |
| PL | Polish | *czasu uniwersalnego* (GMT) | universal time (GMT) |
| ES | Spanish | *hora universa* | universal time |
| FR | French | *temps universel* | universal time |
| IT | Italian | *ora universale* | universal time |
| PT | Portuguese | *tempo universal* | universal time |
| RO | Romanian | *timp universal* | universal time |
| DE | German | *Weltzeit* | "world time" |
| NL | Dutch | *wereldtijd* | "world time" |
| DA | Danish | *verdenstid* (UTC) | "world time" (UTC) |
| SL | Slovenian | *univerzalnem koordinirane času* (UTC) | coordinated universal time (UTC) |

# EU Directive 2000/84

Only two linguistic versions speak of "UTC" while twelve speak of "GMT".

The document did not focus on UTC/GMT: it focused on the dispositions regarding DST.

Thus the linguistic versions were mainly the concern of the translators, probably with little guidance from elsewhere.

# EU Directive 2000/84

A prudent translator errs on the side of caution. If in doubt, use an expression which is known to you; often one which is more general, substituting a casual expression for a technical term.

I think the original draft was English, using "GMT".

NB. Six (BG, EL, ET, LV, HU, SK) opted for the more casual expression "Greenwich time".

It is quite possible that when translators saw the expression GMT they translated it using what they knew was term in their languages.

NB. The Czech and Polish translators maintained "GMT" in parentheses, even though they went for "world time" which they knew to be a received term in Czech/Polish.

Had the document been originally drafted in, e.g., French or German, using *temps universel* = *Weltzeit,* the translators would have opted for "universal time" by default, with a much larger fraction of the languages adopting this expression.

# Future?

The terminological database used by the EU translators does not provide guidance regarding GMT/UTC.

Translators tend to treat these expressions as casual vocabulary rather than technical terms.

Do nothing?

Work with EU terminology experts? If so, what should be the message?

Draw the attention of the E. Commission to the matter, in view of a new Directive, defining legal time within EU/EEA/EFTA?

Possible guidelines for non-technical texts:

(1) "GMT" obsolete

(2.a) "UTC" correct but technical

(2.b) "UT" correct

UK views GMT as national heritage