Recruitment of interpreters at NATO

Candidates should possess good general knowledge, adapt easily and enjoy teamwork

NATO Staff Interpreters.
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WHAT IS NATO?

Origins

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) is an intergovernmental organisation whose core purpose is the collective defence of its members by political and military means in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter. The fundamental operating principle of the Alliance is the indivisibility of the security of its members. It was created in April 1949 when the North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington by 12 countries with the aim of bringing into being a common security system against a potential threat resulting from the policies and growing military capacity of the Soviet Union.

NATO today

After the demise of the Berlin Wall, the Alliance initiated a major adaptation and transformation process. The Strategic Concept adopted at the 1991 Rome Summit Meeting provided for a new approach that would include a streamlining of NATO's military command structure, major changes in its integrated forces and a role in crisis management and peacekeeping. Allied leaders also issued a Declaration establishing the evolving partnership and cooperation with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. At the 1997 Summit meeting in Madrid, the Alliance opened a brand new chapter in its relations with Russia as well as with the Ukraine, endorsed an "open door" policy on future accession, intensified the dialogue with the Mediterranean countries and renewed its support toward progress with respect to the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI). Lastly, at the Washington Summit in April 1999, NATO celebrated its 50 th anniversary, updated its Strategic Concept, reaffirmed its commitment toward enlargement and welcomed its three latest members. Membership currently stands at 19.

For on-line information on the Alliance's historical highlights, current or planned events and job vacancies, check the NATO website at www.nato.int.

INTERPRETATION AT NATO

NATO's Interpretation Section is part of the Conference Services, itself a component of the International Staff where nationals of all member nations may be employed. The Section currently totals 39 staff interpreters (25 have the L/4 grade). Official languages are English and French. However, Russian can be an asset as meetings with that language have become a regular occurrence. Over the last few years, the growing number of new bodies has resulted in a significant increase in the day-to-day workload, and freelance recruitment is definitely on the rise. Consecutive
interpretation is seldom used.

Any applicant to a position as a staff interpreter at NATO must be a national from one of the member nations as well as a graduate from an acknowledged interpretation school, or he/she must show proof of several years' experience in interpretation. Candidates should possess good general knowledge, adapt easily, enjoy teamwork and be reasonably healthy. Working hours vary from day to day and are often unpredictable, but technical facilities are generally good. New Headquarters are to be built and completed by 2008. Meetings are often of a highly complex nature, whether dealing with political, military or technical subjects, and things are often made worse by the faltering pronunciation or syntax of non-native speakers of English or French. Keeping abreast of political and military developments in both languages is essential.

Mandatory requirements for a freelance or in-house recruitment include 1) undergoing an interpretation test, and 2) obtaining a security clearance, plus an interview with Management.

Interpretation tests are usually scheduled during slack periods, i.e. mid-July to late August, or close to the winter holiday season. The applicant first meets briefly with a jury of seasoned interpreters. Then the actual test begins, including sight translation, consecutive interpretation, and simultaneous interpretation, with a far greater emphasis on the latter. The test is very realistic and runs the gamut of NATO specialties, be it a budget committee debate, an operational report, the latest on European security policy or underwater search and rescue. Expect the ordeal to last approximately one hour and a half. After a short recess, the jury finally renders its verdict!

Shortly after completing the test, the successful applicant is requested (by mail) to fill in forms required for the security clearance investigation. The procedure may well take a full year and involves investigations in all countries where the applicant has resided. Recruitment can only become effective after the security clearance has been finalized.

Applications should be sent to the Head Interpreter (Room S-146, NATO, Boulevard Léopold III, 1110 Brussels, Belgium), or to the Head of Recruitment Services (Room I-236, ditto).

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**Recommended citation format:**