

# International Certification Study: Germany

By Jiri Stejskal

In the last issue we reviewed the certification process of the Ukrainian Translators Association, a recently established professional organization for translators and interpreters which is making an effort to introduce credentialing procedures similar to those used by ATA and by other professional organizations in countries where certification is not regulated by the government. Going back to the credentialing of translators and interpreters by the government, which is common for the member countries of the European Union, we will now take a look at the situation in the Federal Republic of Germany.

There is a lot of information available on the Internet, and because space does not allow us to describe the procedures employed by every single federal state, we will provide references for the individual regions and then take a closer look at one of them. I would like to extend my thanks to Norbert Zänker, vice-president of BDÜ (zaenker@bln.de); Mary Höcker, vice-president of BDÜ (mary.hoecker@t-online.de); Dr. Radegundis Stolze, Dipl. Übers., member of BDÜ (stolze@t-online.de); Steffen Schulze, sworn translator and interpreter (steffen@german-translator.biz); Marie Noëlle Chan Hin, sworn graduated translator, member of BDÜ (noelle.chan@t-online.de); Natascha Dalügge-Momme, sworn translator, member of ADÜ Nord (natascha@adue-nord.de); and Reiner Heard, chairman of ATICOM (reiner.heard@gmx.de). For the translation of German sections, I am indebted to Marissa Wright, ATA member and recent graduate of the T&I Institute in Seattle with a certificate in German-to-English translation (marissa.wright@atbi.com); and to Courtney Searls-Ridge, ATA secretary and chair of ATA's

Mentoring Task Force (courtney@germanlanguageservices.com).

"Germany boasts some 10,000 sworn translators and interpreters. This is 10 times more than are needed," says Mr. Zänker, a court interpreter himself.<sup>1</sup> Germany is composed of 16 Bundesländer (federal states) and has 135 Landgerichte (regional courts) that appoint and swear in translators and interpreters. In some instances, higher courts, such as Oberlandesgerichte (higher regional courts), or the state justice ministry may be involved. In some judicial districts, interpreters are sworn in separately from translators,

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who are "authorized." In addition, in some places translators and/or interpreters are "*bestellt*" (appointed), as opposed to "*ermächtigt*" (authorized), "*beeidigt*" (sworn), or "*vereidigt*" (put under oath). These are not just semantic variations. The different epithets also imply different juridical powers and responsibilities. Remuneration of sworn translators and interpreters, however, is governed by a federal law; namely the national Gesetz über die Entschädigung von Zeugen und Sachverständigen (ZSEG). Currently, German legislators

are drafting a new applicable law (see [www.aticom.de/a-zseg.htm](http://www.aticom.de/a-zseg.htm).)

The title of translator and/or interpreter is not protected in Germany. However, in order to be able to translate official documents or to interpret for courts and public authorities, translators and interpreters need an official certificate. Certified individuals can sign and seal a "certified translation" as a "sworn translator," or work as a "sworn interpreter" for the given language. The administration of the oath (that one will translate faithfully and completely) takes place at the regional court of one's residence. Only German citizens and foreigners with permanent residence can apply for the certificate. The certificate is then issued for the respective Bundesland. Sworn translators and interpreters are recognized throughout most of the country, but in certain federal states the certificate is not transferable. For example, in Hamburg, translators and interpreters have to pass oral and written exams regardless of whether or not they have completed suitable studies or acquired an academic degree. Therefore, official authorities in Hamburg usually do not legalize translations by sworn translators from other federal states. In Hamburg, as well as in Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony, the certification is annulled as soon as the translator or interpreter moves to another federal state.

## Eligibility Requirements in General

Eligibility requirements differ from state to state, but the basic requirements are that the applicant:

- Live in the judicial district;
- Have no criminal record; and
- Satisfy the court that he or she is qualified as an interpreter or translator. ➔

The third bullet, qualification as an interpreter or translator, means that the applicant must either obtain an academic degree as “Diplomübersetzer,” based on a four-year university program,<sup>2</sup> or pass a state examination for translators and interpreters, including oral and written exams and a discussion of professional policy. This examination is reportedly very difficult, but no formal education is required. Nearly every Bundesland has a regional examining board offering examinations twice a year. This provides an opportunity for persons who have acquired their knowledge of the given foreign language in a manner other than through formal language education (e.g., by studying abroad).

Formal requirements and opportunities for preparation for the examination are slightly different in each Bundesland. For example, in Bavaria there are several schools offering special preparation for the test, while there is no such opportunity in Hesse. The certificate is only valid for the foreign language tested in the examination. Understandably, all state examinations (about 30 major languages) involve German as one of the languages (i.e., there is no examination in the French→Spanish combination). The courts and relevant authorities maintain lists of sworn translators and interpreters, which they update every year.

### Eligibility Requirements in Bavaria

Because it would be beyond the scope of this article to describe the legal framework for certification of translators and interpreters in each of the federal states, let us take a look at one of them, Bayern (Bavaria). The following text is an excerpt from the current Bavarian legislation concerning the certification of translators and interpreters.<sup>3</sup>

*The following persons have jurisdiction over the official appointment and swearing in of translators and interpreters according to the German Interpreters Law - DolmG - (BayRS 300-12-1-J), amended on 02/10/2000 (GVBl. Page 46),*

- a) *For applicants residing or having a place of business in Bavaria, the head of the District Court in the district where the applicant resides or has a place of business (the head of the Munich I District Court for applicants residing or having a place of business in Munich, the state capital, or Munich District),*
- b) *For all other applicants, the head of the Munich I District Court.*

*To be officially appointed as an Interpreter and/or Translator, the applicant must*

- a) *Be German, or have the same legal status as a German;*
- b) *Be of age;*
- c) *Have a steady income;*
- d) *Have passed the exam according to the regulations established by the Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs in agreement with the Ministry of Justice and of Finance, or passed an exam recognized as equivalent by the Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs; and*
- e) *Not have been convicted of any crime which would render him or her unsuitable as an officially appointed interpreter/translator.*

*In accordance with the exam regulations (ÜDPO) dated 05/07/2001 for translators and interpreters, the respective versions of the state-approved final exams will be administered in the languages offered as*

*primary foreign languages at “vocational colleges” for careers in foreign language in Bavaria according to the school ordinance for Foreign Language Careers in Bavaria (BayRS 2236-9-1-2-UK).*

*To apply for official appointment, the applicant must submit a written application containing the following information to the head of the Munich I District Court (Mailing address: 80316 München, Postfach):*

- a) *Applicant’s first and last name, and profession;*
- b) *Place of residence and telephone number, as well as place of business and nationality, if applicable;*
- c) *Declaration as to whether the application is for appointment as an interpreter or translator, and for which language(s);*
- d) *Declaration of steady income (see above no. 2 c); and*
- e) *Declaration concerning legal convictions (see above no. 2 e).*

*Please include as attachments to the application:*

- a) *A curriculum vitae in tabular form (including father’s first and last name, mother’s first and maiden name, marital status, and spouse’s first and last/maiden name, if applicable);*
- b) *A notarized photocopy of the examination certificate and diploma issued by the governing body of “vocational colleges” in Bavaria, or a Certificate of Recognition (see above no. 2 d); and*
- c) *A recently issued police clearance certificate (Form “O”)*

### State Examinations

As mentioned above, candidates for certification in translation and/or

interpretation who do not have a college degree in translation or interpreting must pass a state examination in order to qualify for the desired credential. State examinations for translators and interpreters are currently offered in the following federal states<sup>4</sup>:

**Baden-Württemberg:**

Oberschulamts Karlsruhe  
Staatliche Prüfungsstelle für  
Übersetzer und Dolmetscher

**Internet:**

[www.oberschulamts-karlsruhe.de](http://www.oberschulamts-karlsruhe.de)

**E-mail:**

[barbara.ware-thuerwaechter@osak.kv.bwl.de](mailto:barbara.ware-thuerwaechter@osak.kv.bwl.de)

**Available languages:** English, French, Hindi, Punjabi, Spanish, and Urdu. English, French, and Spanish are also available at Heidelberg Fremdsprachen-Institut.

**Bayern:**

Bayerischen Staatsministeriums  
für Unterricht und Kultus  
Staatliche Prüfung für Übersetzer  
und Dolmetscher

**Internet:** [www.stmuk.bayern.de](http://www.stmuk.bayern.de)

**E-mail:**

[claudia.reuter-meyns@stmuk.bayern.de](mailto:claudia.reuter-meyns@stmuk.bayern.de)  
[ulrich.troll@stmuk.bayern.de](mailto:ulrich.troll@stmuk.bayern.de)

**Available languages:** Amharic, Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Danish, English, Estonian, Farsi, Finnish, French, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Russian, and Spanish.

**Berlin:**

Staatliches Prüfungsamt für  
Übersetzer im Landessschulamt

**Internet:**

[www.lsa-berlin.de/sps/uebindex.htm](http://www.lsa-berlin.de/sps/uebindex.htm)

**E-mail:** [dagmar.klein@lsa.verwalt-berlin.de](mailto:dagmar.klein@lsa.verwalt-berlin.de)

[heidi.schiesser@senbjs.verwalt-berlin.de](mailto:heidi.schiesser@senbjs.verwalt-berlin.de)

[senbjs.verwalt-berlin.de](mailto:senbjs.verwalt-berlin.de)

**Available languages (translators only!):** Albanian, Arabic, Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, English, Farsi, French, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Spanish, Turkish, and Vietnamese.

**Bremen:**

Der Senator für Bildung,  
Wissenschaft, Kunst und Sport  
Staatliches Prüfungsamt für  
Dolmetscher und Übersetzer

**E-mail:** [ews@uni-bremen.de](mailto:ews@uni-bremen.de)

**Available languages:** English, French, and Spanish.

**Hamburg:**

Industrie- und Handelskammer  
Adolphsplatz 1  
20457 Hamburg

**Internet:** [www.handelkammer.de](http://www.handelkammer.de)

**Available languages:** English, French, Spanish, and Russian

**Hessen:**

Amt für Lehrerbildung  
Staatliche Prüfungen für Übersetzerinnen und Übersetzer,  
Dolmetscherinnen und Dolmetscher  
und Gebärdensprachdolmetscherinnen und  
Gebärdensprachdolmetscher

**E-mail:**

[poststelle@st.pruef.uedg.hessen.de](mailto:poststelle@st.pruef.uedg.hessen.de)

**Available languages:** Albanian, Arabic, Croatian, Czech, English, Farsi, French, Greek, Indonesian, Italian, Korean, Pashto, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovenian, Spanish, and Turkish.

**Rheinland-Pfalz:**

Ministerium für Wissenschaft,  
Weiterbildung, Forschung und  
Kultur

**Internet:** [www.mwwfk.rlp.de](http://www.mwwfk.rlp.de)

**E-mail:**

[ried.neumann@mwwfk.rlp.de](mailto:ried.neumann@mwwfk.rlp.de) and  
[elfriede.kuhns@mwwfk.rlp.de](mailto:elfriede.kuhns@mwwfk.rlp.de)

**Available languages:** Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, Finnish, Greek, Japanese, and Russian.

**Saarland:**

Ministerium für Bildung, Kultur  
und Wissenschaft  
Staatliches Prüfungsamt für  
Übersetzer und Dolmetscher

**E-mail:**

[i.freigang@bildung.saarland.de](mailto:i.freigang@bildung.saarland.de)

**Available languages:** English, French, Italian, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish.

**Sachsen:**

Regionalschulamt Leipzig  
Prüfungsamt für Dolmetscher und  
Übersetzer

**E-mail:** [christine.schuerz@rsal.smk.sachsen.de](mailto:christine.schuerz@rsal.smk.sachsen.de)

[rsal.smk.sachsen.de](mailto:rsal.smk.sachsen.de) and  
[baerbel.reichelt@rsal.smk.sachsen.de](mailto:baerbel.reichelt@rsal.smk.sachsen.de)

**Available languages:** Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, Croatian, Czech, English, French, Hungarian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese.

**Schleswig-Holstein:**

Industrie- und Handelskammer  
Lorentzendamms 24  
24103 Kiel

**Internet:** [www.ihk-kiel.de](http://www.ihk-kiel.de)

**Available languages:** Spanish and English

In most of the federal states there are no continuing education requirements attached to the certification for working as a sworn translator and/or interpreter. Some translator and interpreter organizations, such as BDÜ, only accept applicants who meet said requirements (degree or state ➡

examination) to become members. These organizations offer regular courses for professional practice and continuing education in language proficiency and specialized knowledge.

### **Certified Translations in Germany**

In many countries throughout the world, strict regulations for the certification of translations of official documents exist. We examined this issue to some degree in the article on the United Kingdom and Ireland, the two countries which do not recognize the term “sworn translator,” but which have strict provisions for “sworn translations.” In Germany, official certifications must be carried out by:

- A German authority authorized to use a seal;
- A notary;
- An official sworn translator in Germany for said language; or
- A consulate or embassy of the country of origin in Germany.

The authentication notice of authorities in the Federal Republic of Germany is generally as follows: “This hereby certifies that the preceding/following photocopy is an exact duplicate of the original (title of certificate).”<sup>5</sup> The notice of authentication of the authority must include the place, date, signature, and seal.

If the copy consists of several single pages, it must be proven that all pages are part of the same original. It is possible to arrange the sheets in such a manner so that a part of the seal is imprinted on each page, in which case only one page must be signed and stamped with the authentication notice.<sup>6</sup> Each page can also be certified individually, in which case it is necessary to check that the name of the certificate holder is written on each page. If this is not the

case, the authentication notice should include the holder’s name.<sup>7</sup>

### **Translator and Interpreter Organizations**

#### **BDÜ: Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer e.V. (www.bdue.de)**

BDÜ, founded in 1953, is the major nonprofit professional association for interpreters and translators in Germany. It is a member of the International Federation of Translators (FIT), a Category A nongovernmental organization of UNESCO, and a parliament-registered lobby organization. With headquarters in Berlin, BDÜ, an umbrella organization representing 12 independently registered regional associations, has a total of about 5,000 members. Potential members must submit an application form together with their academic qualification (diploma or university degree) or, if offering a language for which no examination facilities exist, continuous professional experience.

#### **ATICOM: Fachverband der Berufsübersetzer und Berufsdolmetscher e.V. (www.aticom.de)**

ATICOM, a FIT member and parliament-registered lobby organization, is a fairly new association of professional translators and interpreters with stringent admission requirements monitored by an admissions committee. Registered in Bonn, the association currently has approximately 200 members in Germany and abroad.

#### **ADÜ Nord: Assoziierte Dolmetscher und Übersetzer in Norddeutschland e.V. (www.adue-nord.de)**

ADÜ Nord, a member of FIT, is a professional association of interpreters and translators based in

Northern Germany. Membership is subject to high qualifications (university degree in interpreting/translation, examination recognized by the state, or acceptance by an admission committee). As of October 2002, ADÜ Nord has about 270 members in Hamburg (the association’s headquarters), Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony, as well as other federal German states and abroad.

#### **VÜD: Verband der Übersetzer und Dolmetscher e.V. (www.vued.de)**

VÜD was founded in 1990 and joined FIT in 1994. Headquartered in Berlin, VÜD has about 350 members organized in groups throughout Germany. Applicants for membership must show appropriate academic credentials, including an examination in the given field recognized by the state.

In the next issue, we will review certification procedures for translators and interpreters in Mexico. As the editor of this series, I encourage readers to submit any relevant information concerning non-U.S. certification or similar programs, as well as comments on the information published in this series, to my e-mail address at [jiri@cetra.com](mailto:jiri@cetra.com).

### **Notes**

1. “Sworn Translators and Interpreters in Germany,” article supplied by Mr. Zänker.
2. For somewhat dated information, see [www.ice.urv.es/trans/future/tti/germany.html](http://www.ice.urv.es/trans/future/tti/germany.html).
3. Source: [www.justiz.bayern.de/lgmuenchen1/dolm/dolm.html](http://www.justiz.bayern.de/lgmuenchen1/dolm/dolm.html). Translated by Marissa Wright.

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## New Directions for ATA's Nominating Committee Continued

motivate and encourage people to volunteer. One simple way is to let people know what volunteer opportunities are available. People can't volunteer if they don't know where they are needed. If someone in the organization makes a negative comment, turn this around and give some positive information, and let people know that by volunteering they can help solve negative issues. Other suggestions for getting people involved are to give public recognition for volunteer activities, get members to tell what they are doing and publicize these activities in a newsletter, establish networking between organizations and channel information from the national organization to the local level, and create a climate where people want to participate. Camaraderie is important, and one way to get people to attend

meetings and participate in activities is to have good food available.

### Discussion Point 4

Committee member Denzel Dyer led this discussion of training for candidates. Suggestions for ways to impart knowledge to potential candidates include sending them to a regional or national forum where they can learn from their peers, having a line of succession in an organization so that people get a feel for leadership as they move up through the various positions, establishing a written manual for policies and procedures which describes the responsibilities of each position, developing initiatives to fund training programs, and bringing leaders together for brainstorming and idea-sharing sessions. It is important to remember that older

members can be inspired by new members, and, likewise, that new members can learn from the experience of older members.

One final note to remember about volunteering is that volunteer activities are a labor of love. We volunteer because we want to be a part of something. At the same time, we have to remember that the organization is not us; we are simply a part of it. We must separate ourselves so that we can give of ourselves, but yet not get upset and take things too personally. This is a challenge. Dedication and commitment tend to cause us to identify with our organization, but when we achieve "detached attachment," then we are able to help create something truly greater than ourselves.

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## International Certification Study: Germany Continued from p.20

4. For more detailed information, see [www.aticom.de/a-pruefungsaemter.pdf](http://www.aticom.de/a-pruefungsaemter.pdf).
5. Translated by Marissa Wright. The original reads: Die Übereinstimmung der vorstehenden/umstehenden Kopie mit dem Original des (Name des Zeugnisses) wird hiermit beglaubigt.
6. Directions regarding the authentication notice are available at the

ADÜ website ([www.adue-nord.de](http://www.adue-nord.de)). The instructions originate from the "Behörde für Inneres" in Hamburg.

7. Source: The International Office (II A 3) of the Ludwig-Maximilians University Munich; Legal Basis: BayVwVfGes: für Übersetzungen §23,3;5, für Beglaubigungen §33, 3-12.

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## ATA's Customized Website Program

ATA and Two Radical Technologies (2RAD) have teamed up to provide ATA members an opportunity to build their own customized websites. Through 2RAD's online creation tools—RADTown—ATA members will be able to set up their own online presence. The offer includes obtaining a domain name and creating links to the ATA online directories. For more information, please contact 2RAD at [radtown@atanet.org](mailto:radtown@atanet.org) or log on to [www.atanet.org/radtown](http://www.atanet.org/radtown).

### It pays ...

to keep your listings updated in ATA's online **Directory of Translation and Interpreting Services** and **Directory of Language Services Companies** ([www.atanet.org](http://www.atanet.org))