

QSEK-Newsletter No. 1

June 2026

The QSEK Research Project gets underway

The research project

On April 1, 2026, the German Police University and Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz launched their joint research project:

“QSEK – Qualifizierte Sprachmittlung für eine effiziente forensische Kommunikationsüberwachung” (Qualified Intercept Interpreting-Translation for Efficient Forensic Communications Surveillance).

The project brings together a unique research consortium combining expertise in criminalistics, law and translation studies.

Another distinctive feature is the project’s broadly based advisory board, which includes the Düsseldorf Higher Regional Court as innovation mentor, the Federal Public Prosecutor General at the Federal Court of Justice, the Federal Criminal Police Office, the Baden-Württemberg State Criminal

Police Office, the German Federal Association of Interpreters and Translators (BDÜ), the German Institute for Human Rights (DIMR), and defence lawyer Dr Alexander Paradissis (WisteV).

QSEK is funded by the BMFTR (Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space) under the VIP+ validation grant programme, with total funding of EUR 878,799. The project will run until 31 March 2029.

Over the three-year project period, the research team has set the following three main objectives:

1. To disseminate the findings of the foundational research conducted in Switzerland (<https://data.snf.ch/grants/grant/184896>) and to adapt them to the German legal framework; please find the relevant research output in an open access publication:

<https://www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/multilingual-communications-surveillance-in-criminal-law-9781035331468.html>;

2. To develop uniform standards for workflows and for the production of translations relevant to legal proceedings (“translata”) within the context of communications surveillance;
3. To design training programmes for intercept interpreters and translators (IITs) and police officers.

AI applications in intercept interpreting-translation are a key component of all three areas of focus. This also includes integrating AI-assisted translation into the standards and training programmes to be developed.

Kick-off event at the German Police University (DHPol) in Münster on June 23-24, 2026

A first milestone was the project’s kick-off event held on June 23–24 at the DHPol, during which the research team convened with the innovation mentor, the supporting project advisory board, and guests from police and security agencies, the judiciary, the field of intercept interpreting and translation, and the VDI/VDE-IT

representative responsible for the project.

A key objective of the event was to present QSEK’s starting point and objectives and to initiate a first exchange with professionals from policing, the legal sector and language services.

In its introductory presentation, the research team demonstrated that the deployment of IITs significantly impacts both preliminary investigations and subsequent trial proceedings—thereby affecting the rights of the accused. At the same time, current practice faces major challenges: for instance, numerous IITs lacking formal training in translation and interpretation are routinely deployed in communications surveillance, particularly for “rare” languages. Moreover, there is currently no standardised training programme tailored to the uniquely demanding field of intercept interpreting-translation.

Given the forensic and investigative requirements for intercept interpreting-translation—and the growing role of machine translation—there is an urgent need to establish nationwide, scientifically grounded, quality-assuring measures.

From the perspective of translation studies—that is, intercept interpreting-translation—the key question for QSEK is:

How can the actual contribution of IITs to criminal investigations be made visible and how can the quality of intercept interpreting-translation be enhanced? Furthermore, what fundamental and technology-related competencies are required?

Given the absence of uniform, nationwide reliability criteria for workflows in criminal investigations involving intercept interpreting-translation, the police units responsible for implementing such measures often must rely on individual ad-hoc solutions.

From a criminal investigation perspective, the key question thus becomes:

How can investigations be conducted properly and appropriately when deploying IITs?

Not only the competence of the IITs, but also the nature and extent of collaboration between IITs and police officers, significantly influence the quality of translations of intercepted communications (“translate”) used as evidence. Much like an iceberg, the vast majority of processes occurring

during operational measures remain invisible in the final translation (the translated intercept record, TIR). Through their linguistic and cultural expertise as well as their understanding of communication contexts, IITs play a pivotal role in shaping case material; a contribution that remains largely obscured in the official TIR.

These considerations converge on a critical legal question:

How can insights that derive from human intercept interpreting-translation be captured and documented in a manner that preserves their evidentiary value in criminal proceedings and safeguards procedural rights?

Against the background of this insufficiently and inconsistently standardised situation, the increasing use of different AI tools creates additional challenges. There is a risk of a double layer of opacity: the aforementioned “unknowns” of human intercept interpreting-translation are compounded by further uncertainties arising from AI decision-making processes. These, in turn, depend on the type and size of the language models, the model architecture, the scope and timing of their use, and many other factors. The resulting shortcomings risk discrediting machine-generated translations.

Following the research team's presentation, guest speakers from the Swiss Canton of Zurich demonstrated how findings from foundational research had already led to initial standardisation and professionalisation of language mediation in communications surveillance at cantonal level.

Subsequently, four mixed discussion groups, which brought together representatives from the police and other security authorities, the judiciary and intercept interpreting-translation, proved particularly productive. In these groups, the initial input from the presentations was discussed in greater depth. The aim was to give participants an opportunity to share their experiences and discuss their assessments of the presentation content and the project objectives presented. These initial insights will also be used to review the project objectives and measures once again and to ensure that the needs of the groups involved are taken into account from the outset.

The research team considers the kick-off event a resounding success. This is due not only to the highly interesting and insightful contributions made by the experts during the

discussions, but also to the general confirmation of the project's relevance and the participants' interest in remaining involved in its further development.

The evening reception on June 23 further facilitated in-depth exchange and networking among participants and underscored not only the broad consensus regarding the project's goals but also the strong commitment of participating experts to actively support QSEK's further development. The open and constructive dialogue between law enforcement, the judiciary, and IITs further highlighted the value of the project's interdisciplinary approach.

Future directions

The next steps are already being prepared. In the coming weeks QSEK will launch two online surveys:

- The first survey will ask the three stakeholder groups about current practices, challenges and needs in intercept interpreting-translation.
- The second survey will focus specifically on the current and future use of AI tools.

The research team encourages broad participation and kindly asks that the surveys be shared within your

respective professional networks. Only through the lived experiences and assessments of those who engage daily with intercept interpreting-translation can practical standards and training concepts be meaningfully developed.

Find out more about QSEK here:

<https://presse.uni-mainz.de/jgu-und-deutsche-hochschule-der-polizei-starten-gemeinsames-forschungsprojekt-qualifizierte-sprachmittlung-fuer-effiziente-forensische-kommunikationsueberwachung-qsek/>

[https://www.dhpol.de/departments/depart-ment III/FG III.3/qsek.php](https://www.dhpol.de/departments/depart-ment-III/FG-III.3/qsek.php)

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