

QSEK Newsletter No. 2

October 2026



Foto: Katja Preusse (DHPol)

Second meeting of the QSEK research team, innovation mentor and project advisory board

Following the successful QSEK kick-off event in June 2026 (see [QSEK Newsletter No. 1](#)), the research team, the project advisory board and the innovation mentor met in a small group at the German Police University (DHPol) on 7-8 October 2026.

These regular meetings serve to report on the project's progress and to draw on the advisory board members' expertise for the further development of the project through discussions and presentations. They are of great importance to QSEK, as the innovation mentor and the advisory

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board are tasked with supporting project activities with their specialist knowledge and experience. They also help to prepare the best possible groundwork for the subsequent use of the project's results.

Insights into the ongoing online surveys

The meeting gave the research team the opportunity to present first insights into the online surveys currently being conducted among police officers, intercept interpreters and translators (IITs) and legal professionals. These surveys are intended to provide comprehensive findings on current practice in intercept interpreting-translation, on existing challenges, personal assessments and any need for change. Within the project plan, the surveys form the empirical basis for further surveys at later stages.

The research team was pleased to report a strong response to the surveys. Access figures and the feedback received so far indicate considerable interest. As of 13 October 2026, 854 partially or fully completed questionnaires had been received in the police survey, and 187 questionnaires in the

considerably smaller professional group of IITs.



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The survey of legal professionals was also launched at the beginning of the month and, as of the same date, had already been partially or fully completed by 100 respondents. Here, too, members of the project advisory board, such as the BDÜ, actively supported the distribution of the survey.

The meeting provided an opportunity to present to the advisory board preliminary insights from the responses received so far and to discuss them with regard to QSEK's three main objectives: raising awareness among the stakeholder groups involved, developing uniform reliability standards and designing training programmes.

New perspectives from expert presentations

Involving the interdisciplinary expertise of the innovation mentor and the advisory board is a fundamental element of the project. Over the three-year project period, the meetings of the research consortium are therefore also intended to give advisory board members the opportunity to deliver presentations that bring new perspectives into the project and broaden its knowledge base.

The series was opened by two advisory board members: Dr Alexander Paradissis, criminal defence lawyer (WisteV), and Dr Armin Hoenen from the Architecture, AI and Innovation Division of the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA).

In the first presentation entitled “Consequences of deficient language mediation in preliminary investigations: The procedural impact of early translation errors in the light of the inertia and perseverance effects”, Dr Paradissis gave a compelling account of the consequences of inaccurate or erroneous intercept interpreting-translation output. Describing “telecommunications surveillance as a cascade”, he illustrated how

preconceptions, or an initial interpretation or hypothesis formed on the basis of the translated intercepts (for example regarding the course of events or the question of guilt), can shape the further interpretation of investigative findings and the decisions based on them, with potential consequences for the entire subsequent criminal proceedings. Such beliefs, once formed by the police or the judiciary, may persist even after they have been disproved and may lead to new, contradictory findings being re-interpreted to fit them, a phenomenon referred to in cognitive science as perseverance or inertia.

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Although the perseverance phenomenon is not limited to language mediation in communications surveillance, in the research context of QSEK it highlights how crucial accurate intercept interpreting-translation is for investigations. Since the police, public prosecutors and courts are unable to assess conversations conducted in other languages themselves, accuracy also means giving due consideration to possible linguistic, cultural and situational interpretations, as well as ensuring transparency where uncertainties remain. The following presentation, “Towards a legal risk score for machine translation”, provided an excellent complement to the previous one: Dr Armin Hoenen turned to the use of machine translation in intercept interpreting-

translation, a topic of particular relevance and urgency for all professional groups involved.

Dr Hoenen began by pointing out that machine translation systems, especially those based on large language models (LLMs) or their derivatives, are currently not comprehensively regulated by law, while at the same time being difficult to assess in general from a technical perspective. In the context of intercept interpreting-translation, this raises pressing practical questions for those involved (police, IITs and the judiciary) in their daily work: “Where am I permitted to use machine translation?” and “How can I determine whether a system for a language pair such as English-German or Portuguese-German already offers sufficient quality to convey the

content of the source language at least roughly in the target language?" In his presentation, Dr Hoenen introduced an approach that uses the frequency of critical translation errors and so-called full hallucinations to derive a metric for estimating the risks of machine translation. In future, such a metric could help to assess the suitability of machine translation systems for specific areas of application and to identify potential sources of error at an early stage.

The legal conclusions to be drawn from such a metric for a given context of use require separate assessment. The approach presented thus provides a valuable impetus for QSEK's further engagement with quality requirements for machine translation.

This second meeting of the research team and the project advisory board once again demonstrated the relevance of QSEK's inter- and transdisciplinary approach, the stated aim of which is not merely to aggregate knowledge from different academic disciplines but to integrate it, while giving a central role to the participation of practitioners from policing, the judiciary and the translation professions. The QSEK research team

would once again like to thank the innovation mentor and all members of the advisory board for their time and commitment and looks forward to meeting again in 2027.

Ongoing project activities and outlook

Following the successful launch of the online surveys on fundamental questions of intercept interpreting-translation, a targeted survey on the use of automatic transcription, machine translation and AI in intercept interpreting-translation will follow before the end of 2026. Given the urgency of the topic and the rapid pace of developments, the research team hopes for a similarly strong response to this second survey, which will be distributed to the stakeholder groups through the established channels. A further milestone will be a workshop with experts from policing, the judiciary and intercept interpreting-translation on 13–14 April 2027. At this workshop, the project results obtained so far will be presented to practitioners, possible implications for practice will be discussed and solutions will be developed jointly.

The workshop thus fulfils the project's objective of developing solutions in a participatory manner and at the same time responds to the desire for active involvement in QSEK's objectives expressed at the kick-off event and in the surveys.

Contact

For further information, please contact:

griebco@uni-mainz.de

joachim.fassbender@dhpoll.de

lars.berster@dhpoll.de

or

contact@qsek.eu

At a glance

Am On 1 April 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 criminal defence lawyer Dr Alexander Paradissis (WisteV).

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

- 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;
- To develop uniform standards for workflows and for the production of translations relevant to legal

proceedings (“translata”) within the context of communications surveillance;

- 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.

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