

SHORTHAND OFFICE AT THE HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENT

Judit Dani for the IPRS meeting in Budapest - October 2010

I would like to greet you in IPRS-meeting at Budapest. Please, allow me to present myself, I am Judit Dani from Hungarian Office for Shorthand Writing and it is a great honour for me to show you the work of the office in few words.

First I would present the Office of the National Assembly within the Office for Shorthand Writing.

The National Assembly, the officers, the House Committee, the committees and, in defined duties, the MPs are aided in their work by the Office of the National Assembly.

Prior to the regime change, the Office of the National Assembly largely dealt with financial and technical matters. There was no requirement for well qualified experts to assist the work of the National Assembly since Parliament had no political weight and held sittings very seldom. The past 20 years have seen the development of an organisation divided into separately managed parts with the necessary professional resources to assist the National Assembly in its operation and to carry out its new and increasing duties as it provides support for the legislative process. The most important tasks for the Office of the National Assembly are set down by the Standing Orders, while its tasks and organisational structure are laid down in more detail in the Rules of Organisation and Operation. The Office, a functioning organisation of the National Assembly, is divided into various organisational units: the Office of the Secretary General, the Department of Business Affairs, the Speaker's Cabinet, the Office for Foreign Relations, the Press Service and the Library of the National Assembly.

The work of the Office is under the direction of the Speaker either through the heads of the individual administrative units or directly.

Henceforward I would like to say some words about the institution of the Office for Shorthand Writing. Earlier the Parliament had had its own Office for Shorthand Writing which ceased in the early fifties because the sitting of the Parliament changed, so the Parliament - sitting twice a year for a few days - couldn't give enough work for stenographers. From that time to the election in 1990 the Hungarian News Agency supplied the task of taking the minutes. In this place worked the staff of old shorthand office and the Hungarian News Agency assumed employment of young, talented shorthand-writers.

Between 1990 and 1996 the Unit of the Hungarian Shorthand-writers and Typewriters did the minutes of the plenary sessions and committee meetings of Parliament. This time, in 1996 an other firm won the chance for the work on a public procurement procedure. For the lack of well-trained stenographers this firm couldn't do good work - there were too many mistakes in the minutes -, so the Office of the National Assembly decided to create a new office making an end of defencelessness of outside firms.

The Office for Shorthand Writing was founded in today's form on 1st of January 1997 as a new organisation of the Office of the National Assembly. In consideration of special tasks the staff of the new shorthand office consists of civil servants and

contributors, so-called entrepreneur. Among them you can find some who work only once a week and most of them have another job.

The staff of the office have higher qualification, the majority of them have teacher or administrative degree, but you can find a cultural organizer and a physicist too. Nowadays the office has 30 associates, 13 civil servants – amidst the head clerk – and 17 contributors. Conditions of their employment are least 300 syllable examination or competition result from stenography.

The shorthand office is at work under the Secretary General directly and the main task is making verbatim minutes about the plenary sessions and the committee meetings accordingly the Standing Order.

„The Minutes

Standing Order No. 65

(1) Verbatim minutes shall be taken of everything that has been said at the sittings, and the minutes shall be authenticated by the notaries. If the Parliament discusses a speech outside the Orders of the Day or discusses one or more orders of the day in camera, this/these will be recorded in separate minutes.

(2) The archival appendices of the minutes are

1. the document proceeded with,
2. the communication that has been read out,
3. the list of names of the voting by name,
4. the minutes of the secret balloting,
5. the signed oath document,
6. the question requiring a written answer and the answer to the same.

(3) The voting list by computer shall be an appendix to the minutes.

Standing Order No. 66

(1) The Speaker of Parliament shall ensure that the minutes be taken.

(2) The verbatim minutes shall include every declaration, speech and interruption, as well as any loud expression of approval or disapproval.

(3) The Member or other speaker may request within three days of the authentication and putting on public display of the minutes the correction of the erroneous text of his speech in the minutes. The Speaker chairing the session shall decide in the matter after hearing the person requesting the correction.

(4) The verbatim minutes - without the appendices - shall be sent in a printed form within fifteen days following the procedure pursuant to paragraph (3) to the Members, the President of the Republic, the members of the Government, the President of the Constitutional Court, the President of the Supreme Court, the Chief Public Prosecutor, the Ombudsmen, the Head of the State Audit Office, the President of the National Bank of Hungary, as well as to the metropolitan, county, and university libraries. The Member may declare in writing if he does not request the receipt of the printed minutes.

(5) On the basis of the minutes of the public sittings of the Parliament, the Parliamentary Journal containing a subject and name index shall be published by

sessions, and made available on electronic data media. The Speaker of Parliament shall see to its publication.

(6) The verbatim minutes on the public sittings of the Parliament authenticated by the notaries should be filed in the archives and the printed, authenticated minutes and the Parliamentary Journal shall be deposited at the Library of Parliament.”

The rules of Standing Order say that the verbatim minutes contain the repair the incidental linguistic or grammatical imprecisions, minor fault of structure of sentences or word order being in accordance with writing requirements and the punctuation in line with the speaker’s idiom. So the verbatim minutes don’t mean letters by letters or words by words minutes.

At the present time the Parliament sits on Mondays and Tuesdays where 9 stenographers work with ten minutes turns. So the stenographer has 80 minutes to make the turns on computer. These turns are controlled by two stylistic revisioners on the basic sound recording. Within 2 or 3 hours at the end of the sitting the whole minutes is available for Secretariat for Recording where after correctoring the notaries confirm the minutes.

The shorthand office keeps book – called book of turns - about plenary sessions in which the events can be closely followed. The book of turns you can find the short signature of stenographers, the speakers’ name and the changing of presidency and notary of ten minutes arrangement.

Besides making verbatim minutes about the plenary sessions the task of the shorthand office is to make verbatim minutes about standing committee, temporary committee and investigatory meeting, according to the Standing Order too. Similarly the main tasks of the shorthand office is to take minutes about the House Committee of the National Assembly. (In other countries often referred to as the Presidency, the Bureau, the Committee of Wise Men or the Main Committee.)

Standing committees and temporary committees assist the work of the National Assembly. The new Parliament established its committee system at its sitting and now there are 19 standing committees. Committees meet on a weekly basis and this system causes problems in organization sometimes. The number of temporary committees and the investigate committees and frequency of their meetings add to unpredictableness of work.

Committee meetings are open to the press, but with regard to the nature of the agenda item being discussed, the committee may decide to sit in camera. Verbatim minutes of the committee meetings are also available on the web-site of the National Assembly.

The time which is available to take the minutes is regulated in the rules of Shorthand Office, so we know three time limits. The immediately term means 24 hours, the urgent means 3 workdays and the normal term means 7 workdays. Usually two shorthand-writers take the minutes of committee meetings with turns of 10 minutes, but there is a frequent occurrence that only one does it, especially if the committee meetings and plenary session are at the same time. Sometimes 4 or 6 shorthand-writers make the minutes, which is typical when the committee meeting is probably too long and the making term is immediate. The task of the shorthand office is to send an e-mail to MPs from getting ready of minutes.

Finally I would like to say some words about the associates of Shorthand Office. As you know, we have two world champions, Eva Lestár and Erika Vicai. We get a lot of material and moral support from leaders of National Assembly to the participation in competitions.