

## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH ALERT

### Sound Quality Problems in Justus Lipsius – Floors 20 & 35 A Known Problem Still Without a Response

Brussels, 1<sup>st</sup> July 2026

FR

*TAO is raising the alarm about a persistent and worsening sound quality problem in the meeting rooms of Floors 20 & 35 of the Justus Lipsius building. What makes this situation particularly concerning is that a technical improvement has already been identified — and not acted upon.*

#### A DETERIORATING SITUATION

**The scale of the problem is documented:** 28 incidents have been registered in the SCIC technical incidents register in the Justus Lipsius building since 2023, **11 of which since January 2026 alone**. This frequency of incidents is not a marginal anomaly — it is a structural problem demanding structural remediation.

Interpreters working in Floors 20 & 35 are experiencing a range of serious and recurring audio problems: aggressive metallic sound, elevated ambient noise reaching both speakers and interpreters in the booths, frequent Larsen (feedback)

effects, crackling from defective microphone capsules, and a general degradation of speech intelligibility that makes interpretation significantly more demanding.

These conditions are causing cumulative harm. Prolonged exposure to substandard and unpredictable sound — including sudden acoustic shocks — carries documented risks of auditive fatigue and trauma. Equally concerning is the **exhaustion that comes from repeatedly reporting the same incidents**: interpreters who report these problems again and again without seeing results eventually stop reporting. This masks the true scale of the issue and makes systematic remediation harder to justify.

### **THE ROOT CAUSE: COMPRESSION TREATMENT OF SOUND**

Sound tests have been conducted jointly with Council technicians, SCIC Directorate C colleagues, and the Interpreters' Delegation. These tests pointed to a specific technical culprit: **the compression processing applied to the audio signal**. Compression appears to be generating the metallic distortion, erratic sound dynamics, and feedback susceptibility that interpreters are experiencing.

Critically, the tests produced concrete results: a set of parameters was identified that, by deactivating or significantly reducing compression, **produced a meaningful and noticeable improvement in sound quality**. This was not a theoretical finding — it was demonstrated during the tests themselves, with interpreters and technical staff present.

Those parameters do not appear to have been implemented. The sound in Floors 20 & 35 remains problematic. **TAO considers this unacceptable.**

### **EQUIPMENT RENEWAL: LONG OVERDUE AND NON-NEGOTIABLE**

Beyond the compression issue, the audio equipment in Floors 20 & 35 is showing its age across the board. Consoles, headsets, microphone capsules, and delegate earpieces are all long overdue for replacement. The contrast with the Europa building, the Lex building, and the renovated rooms on Level 50 is visible and should not be acceptable.

**TAO** is aware that a possible future conversion of these floors into a Hub has been cited as a reason to defer the necessary

investment. We do not accept this argument. **No decision on the construction of an interpretation hub is imminent, and Member States have not shown enthusiasm for the costly demolition it would entail.** Workers' health and safety cannot be placed on hold pending a hypothetical renovation project.

Furthermore, **TAO** underlines that any future negotiations concerning a potential Council Hub must not be conducted without the active involvement of the relevant staff representatives — specifically the Interpreters' Delegation (ID) and the Commission trade unions. Decisions of this magnitude, affecting working conditions and physical infrastructure, cannot be reached over the heads of those most directly concerned.

Moreover, a more cost-effective alternative deserves serious consideration: the existing infrastructure could be reconfigured in a **flexible dual-use configuration**, serving both as traditional meeting rooms with interpreter booths and as a complementary Hub when needed. This would preserve capacity, avoid demolition costs, and make equipment modernisation logical under any future scenario.

### **TAO'S CALL: URGENT ACTION, COLLABORATIVE APPROACH**

**TAO** is not seeking to assign blame. We recognise that audio system management in large conference facilities is technically complex and involves multiple institutional actors. What we are calling for is **urgency and genuine follow-through**.

Specifically, **TAO** calls on SCIC and the General Secretariat of the Council to:

- **Ensure the parameters identified during the sound tests are implemented without further delay** — with verification involving interpreter representatives
- **Engage the Council in a structured and time-bound process** to address both the immediate audio settings and the longer-term equipment renewal
- **Include staff representatives and the Interpreters' Delegation** as active participants in any technical working group,

not merely as observers of a fait accompli

- **Collect information transparently on the status of remediation measures** so that interpreters and their representatives can assess whether improvements are real and lasting
- **Ensure that any future Hub negotiations formally involve the Interpreters' Delegation and Commission trade unions** — not as a formality, but as substantive participants in decisions that directly affect their working conditions

**The tools to make progress exist. The technical diagnosis has been done. What is needed now is the institutional will to act on it.**

## **TAO-The Independents**



**Join TAO to reinforce the staff's action and to be informed on your rights!**

### **TAO -The Independents**

European Commission

Rue Joseph II, 70 – 1049 Bruxelles

+32 2 296 25 89 // [rep-pers-tao@ec.europa.eu](mailto:rep-pers-tao@ec.europa.eu)

# TAO - The Independents



You receive this email because you are an official or agent of the European Commission and therefore listed in its formal directory.

**TAO-The Independents** is an official EC staff association. [Here](#) to unsubscribe. [Here](#) to view our Policy statement.