

# The official language status of English within the EU institutions after Brexit

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## Abstract

*Brexit has become one of the hot topics in the last few years. In June 2016, the UK voted for leaving the EU and, since then, the process has been going on. For the first time in the EU history, a member state has started a process for leaving the EU. Many researchers focused on this topic and its possible impacts on the European Union (EU). In this study, the effect of Brexit is researched in terms of English as one of the 24 official languages of the EU. Multilingualism is an important part of the language policy of the EU and the status of English has a special importance in this policy area as being both one of the official and working languages of the EU. The aim of this study is to research how this status will change after the UK leaves the EU.*

**Keywords:** European Union, official language, multilingualism, Brexit, English

## Introduction

The European Union (EU) is a *sui generis* union. Ulrich Ammon (2012, p. 571) defines EU as being “politically and economically less coherent and integrated than a federation of states but more than a mere organisation of cooperating states.” This definition emphasises its unique structure. It is a multilingual union with 24 official languages and its multilingualism is one of the founding principles of the EU (European Commission, 2015). The official languages of its members are the official languages of the Union and its language policy has a long history. This offers an understanding of how important it is for the EU. The language policy of the EU is closely related to the multilingualism of the Union. The multilingualism of the EU occurs not only as a consequence of its 24 official languages but also due to many other indigenous regional and minority languages spoken within the EU. Multilingualism within the EU is also about different levels of multilingualism such as multilingualism of individuals, multilingualism of society and multilingualism of institutions; in this case, it is focused on the multilingualism of institutions.

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The EU has enlarged since its foundation. At first, there were just six member states and 4 official languages but now the EU has 28 member states and 24 official languages. With the first enlargement of the EU, the UK, Ireland and Denmark became members in 1973<sup>1</sup> and the first member state which ever wanted to leave the Union is the UK. This withdrawal will probably change many things for both sides because membership to the EU entails interwoven relations among member states. Here, it is focused on the effects of Brexit on the language policy since English is one of the official and working languages of the EU and it is most widely spoken foreign language within the EU.

This research is especially aimed to identify the status of English in the EU institutions after Brexit. In order to do so, some brief information about the language policy and multilingualism of the EU is provided, then it is focused on the multilingualism of the EU institutions and finally, the present status of English is defined. Brexit is also explained in order to be able to reveal the future status of English and research findings are given in the conclusion. The main argument of this research is that, after Brexit, the status of English as an official and working language in the EU institutions will slightly change and Regulation No 1/58 should be amended in a clear way, leaving no room for doubt about the official languages of the EU if a member state prefers to leave the EU.

In general, this study adopts a qualitative approach and it uses the analysis of official documents and relevant literature as a research method. Within this scope, the language policy of the EU is traced with the treaties and official documents in order to observe the historical development of this policy and also to explain its legal basis. The current status of English is also explained with the analysis of the documents and references to literature. The quantitative approach is also used to evaluate and support the status and importance of English by referring survey results and statistical data. Then, Brexit and its possible effects on the official status of English in the EU institutions are discussed according to explained legal basis, the views of the EU political actors and relevant literature to put forward possible outcomes of Brexit.

## **1. The European Union Language Policy**

The EU is a multilingual union, which respects, supports and promotes the multilingualism and language diversity of the EU. In 1957, when the Community was founded, there were just 4 official languages but today, there are 24 official languages and over 60 indigenous regional or minority languages (EC, 2015a). The language policy of the EU started to be shaped with the first Council Regulation,

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<sup>1</sup> European Parliament, History: The first enlargement – Denmark, Ireland and Britain, (retrieved from [https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/history-the-first-enlargement-denmark-ireland-and-britain\\_V001-0013\\_ev](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/history-the-first-enlargement-denmark-ireland-and-britain_V001-0013_ev)).

which was about the official and working languages of the Community. Since then, the language policy of the EU has not changed in essence but the number of the official languages of the EU has increased and amendments have been made according to these enlargements. With the first enlargement, the UK became a member and, with the following enlargements, as Diarmait and Bonotti (2018, p. 12) citing S. van der Jeught state, the importance of English as the *de facto* main working language has increased. The situation for the institutions of the EU became more complex with the increase in the number of member states but the importance of English did not change; instead, its importance increased especially after the 2004 enlargement. With the enlargement, it became difficult to find translators and interpreters from one of the new official languages into other languages and English was used as one of the relay languages to provide translations and interpretations from or into one of these languages<sup>2</sup>. Another example, showing the growing importance of English is the increase in the documents prepared in English after the Eastern enlargement. In 2004, the documents prepared in English in the Commission were 62% of all the documents while it reached 72% in 2008 (Ginsburgh and Weber, 2011, p. 166). According to Fernand de Varennes (2012, p. 161), with this enlargement English has become the only common language for many officials in internal practice. These views and facts show how English has gained prominence in time. Some definitions should be provided to be able to research the language policy of the EU and specify the research area, which is to be examined.

The language policy of the EU is a vast area, which includes official languages, working languages, indigenous regional or minority languages of the EU; so, it can be stated that multilingualism is an important part of it. It is also about which language is focused on: the language of the EU, the language of the institutions, the language of the society or the language of individuals? This research is mainly focused on the official and working languages of the EU as they are also the languages of the EU institutions.

The history of the EU language policy can be traced back to the Treaty of Rome. Article 217 stated that „The rules governing the languages of the institutions of the Community shall, without prejudice to the provisions contained in the rules of procedure of the Court of Justice, be determined by the Council, acting unanimously” (EC, 1957, p. 74). Here, it was clarified that some issues related to the languages of the institutions of the Community would be decided with unanimous consent. Another crucial point in this Treaty was Article 248, which stated that all four texts of the Treaty were equally authentic (EC, 1957, p. 80). These articles can be seen as the starting point of the language policy of the EU. Here, it should also be noted that the national languages of member states are some of the most important components of their identities and this principle has been preserved since the

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<sup>2</sup> European Parliament, EP Translators (retrieved from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/files/organisation-and-rules/multilingualism/en-ep\\_translators.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/files/organisation-and-rules/multilingualism/en-ep_translators.pdf)).

beginning within this Union. Ulrich Ammon and Jan Kruse (2013, p. 24) also emphasise the importance of languages for national identities by stating that culture, language and nationality are inseparable components of national identities.

Another important step in the development of the language policy was the first Council Regulation No 1/58 by which Dutch, French, German and Italian were accepted as official and working languages of the Community institutions - member states and their citizens may send documents to the institutions in one of the official languages and the institution will reply in the same language and the most important article was Article 8 in which it was stated that “If a Member State has more than one official language, the language to be used shall, at the request of such State, be governed by the general rules of its law” (EC, 1958). This Article has a special importance within this research because, as it is known, there are member states in the EU which use the same official languages and, because of that, the number of member states and that of the official languages of the EU is not same. For example, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria, Cyprus, Ireland and Malta have the same (common) official languages as other EU member states. English and Irish are the official languages of Ireland and when English became the official language of the EU, Ireland got the opportunity to propose Irish as the official language of the EU. The same was for Malta. This aspect will be mentioned in the second part, as well. But there are also member states which did not apply for one of their official languages to be an official language of the EU. Luxembourg can be an example of such a member state.

The development of the language policy of the EU continued with treaties, regulations, conclusion, resolutions, programmes and reports. The first developments were mainly about language learning, education, culture and partly about constructing a Union identity. This can be seen in the *Resolution of the Council and Ministers of Education on comprising an action programme in the field of education* where “offering all pupils the opportunity of learning at least one Community language” (EC, 1976, p. 4) was stated as an objective. The objectives related to language learning and the languages which should be learned have changed since the beginning. In time, it became two languages of the Union plus mother tongue with Council *Resolution on the early teaching of European Union languages* (EC, 1997, p. 1) and in the Barcelona European Council Meeting in 2002, at least two foreign languages were stated as an objective (EC, 2002, p. 19). These resolutions and conclusion show how the objectives related to language learning have changed as the first objective was just about Community languages but there were not any restrictions about the languages to be learnt in the following objectives. The target related to the number of languages to be learnt was also changed as there was at least one at the beginning but later it became at least two. These decisions and objectives are about the multilingualism of individuals, in particular, and the multilingualism of society, in general. At the beginning, proficiency in foreign languages was thought to be beneficial for occupational and personal opportunities,

sense of belonging, cultural awareness (EC, 1995, p. 44). But later with the Lisbon Strategy, the scope of language policy changed and, as Ruth Wodak and Michal Krzyzanowski stated, this Strategy “put languages among a set of crucial skills to be fostered throughout the EU member states if the Union is to become one of the world’s most competitive knowledge-based economies” (2010, p. 117). From then on, promoting multilingualism is not just about individuals, but also about the EU and its place within the international system. There are many other resolutions, decisions, conclusions, actions and programmes related to multilingualism, its importance for the EU and how it is promoted. All these developments show how important it is for the EU.

## **Multilingualism**

In general, multilingualism can be described as “the co-existence of more than one language in any given situation” (Hornsby, n.d.). This is a very general definition of multilingualism. However, within this study, a more specific definition is needed as multilingualism “refers to both a person’s ability to use several languages and the co-existence of different language communities in one geographical area” (EC, 2005, p. 3). Even though this definition is missing institutional multilingualism, it gives the frame of multilingualism in the EU. Starting from this point and making it a little bit specific, multilingualism can be separated in three groups; individual multilingualism, social multilingualism and institutional multilingualism (FUEN, p. 9). This separation makes it easy to focus on different types of multilingualism from different points of view.

Individual multilingualism is related to the proficiency of human beings in more than one language (FUEN, p. 10). When focused on the other two types of multilingualism, it can be noted that while social multilingualism “refers to the coexistence of several languages in one society”, institutional multilingualism “refers to the coexistence of several languages within institutions” (FUEN, pp. 11-12). In this study, the aim is to research institutional multilingualism in order to state the current and future status of English within the EU. Therefore, it will be focused on how multilingual EU institutions are and which languages provide this multilingualism and what the place of English is within these institutions.

Rafal Manko made another categorization in a briefing, which was prepared for the European Parliament in 2017, and there, it was stated that “EU multilingualism falls into three categories; the original (authentic) languages of the Treaties, the official languages of the EU and the working languages of the EU” (Manko, 2017, p. 1). This categorization can be evaluated as a sub-categorization of institutional multilingualism because each category is related to the structure and institutions of the EU. With this categorization, another point, which is frequently discussed, is mentioned: official languages and working languages of the EU. As stated above, the working languages and official languages of the EU were

determined by Regulation No1/58 but it has been amended many times as the number of the EU member states increased in time. Ulrich Ammon and Jan Kruse (2013, pp. 16-17) define working languages as the languages which are used for political discourse and writing source documents while official languages are the languages used for translation and interpretation targets.

The concepts of working languages and official languages are not so clear. When the subject is official language, co-official languages and official languages with derogation should also be mentioned. The EU has 24 official languages but it also has co-official languages, such as Catalan and Welsh (Eurostat, 2019). And there is a derogation for Irish, which became one of the full official languages of the EU in 2007. Before that time, only the primary legislation was drawn up in Irish. Even though it became a full official language of the EU, only the EU Council's and the European Parliament's regulations are translated into Irish, which means that other EU regulations and other legislative texts are not. This derogation was extended twice; the last extension was made in 2015 until 31 December 2021 (EC, (b)). Another member state, which had a derogation was Malta but it was only for 3 years and it was stopped in 2007 (EC, (b)). Here, it should be noted that Ireland and Malta have two official languages and the other official language for both of these states is English and, for that reason, they bear a special importance for the future status of English as they are the only member states which can apply for English to be the official language of the EU after Brexit. This is going to be discussed later in this research.

The subject of official and working languages of the EU is complicated in practice and, as Gazzola states, "there is an operational distinction between them" (2006, p. 396). The definition, which Gazzola cited from Labrie, is also quite appropriate for this paper. According to this definition, official languages are the languages used in the communication between institutions and the outside world while working languages are those used between institutions within institutions and during internal meetings of the institutions (2006, p. 396). Ammon (2012, p. 575-576), making reference to Labrie, underlines the same point of view; working languages are the languages used for internal institutional communication and the official languages are the languages used for communication between the EU government or institution and member states. Even though the official languages and the working languages of the EU were clearly specified in the first regulation and its amendments, the situation is different in practice. Article 6 of the Regulation states that "The institutions of the Community may stipulate in their rules of procedure which of the languages are to be used in specific cases" (EC, 1958). Therefore, each institution specified which languages to be used in which situation. Consequently, for this paper, it will be meaningful and beneficial to look at how institutions implement this rule.

In Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, Rule 158 gives details about the use of languages in the Parliament and according to this rule, all EU documents must be

in all EU languages, the MEPs have the right to speak in one of the official languages, simultaneous interpretation into official languages and into other languages which the Bureau may consider necessary must be provided and interpretation must also be provided in committee and delegation meetings (Manko, 2017, p. 5). However, it should be noted that the Code of Conduct on Multilingualism was adopted by the Bureau in 2014 and it stated that “Language facilities in Parliament shall be managed on the basis of the principles governing ‘resource-efficient full multilingualism’” and the concept of “user’s real needs” was also mentioned (EP, 2014). Therefore, it can be said that not everything is going to be translated or interpreted because of the costs implied, the efficient use of resources and according to the real needs. This means that if the need is not real, texts may not be translated. In the Council, the situation is also similar as Manko states “the Council deliberates and takes decisions only on the basis of documents and drafts drawn up in the languages specified in the rules in force governing languages” but there may be some limitations when the Council makes decisions unanimously (2017, p. 6). The Commission also uses the authentic languages in any instruments adopted by the Commission in the course of a meeting and must reply letters from citizens in the language of the initial letter (Manko, 2017, p. 6). However, it “conducts its internal business in English, French and German, going fully multilingual when it communicates with the other EU institutions, the Member States and the public” (EC, 2014, p. 3). In the Court of Justice, all official languages may be used in cases but the internal working language is French (Manko, 2017, pp. 6-7). Therefore, it is clear that the Court of Justice is multilingual in the cases but monolingual in its internal working.

Here, it can be said that, in general, the language policies of the EU in the institutions are defined clearly in their rules of procedures and all official languages are used on equal footing according to these rules but, in practice, it is difficult to say that all official languages are used in the institutions because of costs. So, it can be said that real needs, cost-effective and resource effective approaches have become more important as the number of member states and of official languages increased. For that reason, multilingualism may not be performed as well as during the previous years. Besides, it is difficult to both provide full multilingualism and be cost-effective because of the expenses incurred by translation and interpretation services.

## **2. The current status of English**

In the EU, some member states have the same official language. Consequently, while the EU has 28 member states, it has 24 official languages. English is one of these official languages. It is the official language of the UK, Ireland and Malta. Although Ireland and Malta have other official languages, English is also one of their official languages. These two member states notified their official languages to be other than English as the official languages of the EU. So, there is no other member state, except the UK, which notified English as the official language of the EU.

Within the EU, German (16%) is the most widely spoken mother tongue, as it is the most populated member state and Italian and English (13%) are the second most widely spoken mother tongues (Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 5). Germany is the most populated member state in the EU so it is normal to have the most widely spoken mother tongue in the EU. But as stated in the Eurobarometer (2012, p. 6), “at the national level, English is the most widely spoken foreign language in 19 of the 25 Member States where it is not an official language.” According to another data about the most widely spoken foreign language, it can be noticed that English (38%) is the most widely spoken foreign language, French (12%) is the second one and the third one is German (11%) (Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 5). The percentage difference between the first and the second language is quite high. English is three times more widely spoken as a foreign language than French and German. Thus, it is clear that English is the most preferred and learnt foreign language within the EU. Ginsburgh and Moreno-Ternero (2018, p. 1775) also provide statistical data about the most common language in the EU. According to their data, English is the most common language with 37% of Europeans knowing it well or very well in the EU.

When we turn to the most spoken languages within the institutions of the EU, it can also be said that English is the most preferred one. For example, as stated above, English is one of the working languages of the Commission together with French and German but, as Gazzola (2006, p. 397) notes, these are not the official working languages of the Commission being just the most commonly used languages within the institution. He also states that English is the working language of the European Central Bank. On the website of the European Central Bank, it is noted that the homepage and the main menu are only in English; however, the individual sections include a lot of content in other official languages of the EU but not the main menu<sup>3</sup>. Here, it should be noticed that Irish is not one of these 22 languages. This is just one example. Another example showing the dominance of English can be the translated pages in the Commission. In 2015, more than 1.6 million pages were translated into English while the pages translated into French were just 72.662. The dominance of English in the plenary sessions in the European Parliament is also clear as English was used for 129.9 hours while German was used for 76.31 and French was used for 38.14 hours in the plenary sessions in the European Parliament in 2012 (Mohdin, 2018). This shows how intensively English was used in the Commission and the Parliament. Another example can be the use of English as a drafting language. Mattias Derlen (2018, p. 342), citing the European Commission, and J.W Baaji point out that English is the most preferred drafting language, a position that used to be held by French in the past.

Another point which should be noted here is that translation from one language into another may not be possible if one of these languages is less used. To

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<sup>3</sup> European Central Bank (ECB) (n.d.), Language policy of this website (retrieved from <https://www.ecb.europa.eu/home/languagepolicy/html/index.en.html>).



solve this problem, in 2004, when the largest enlargement took place, the European Parliament started to use a relay languages system and this means “the text is first translated into English, French or German and then, from that language into the other languages”<sup>4</sup>. So, these three languages, as the most used languages, have a key role in providing multilingualism in the EU not just as one of its official and/or working languages but also as a language used as a tool to maintain multilingualism.

In general, it can be said that, at present, English is one of the languages used more frequently than many of the other official languages of the EU. It is one of the foreign languages, which is more preferred than the other languages by the citizens of the EU. It is one of the most widely used working languages beside French and German. Finally, it is one of the key languages, which has an essential role in maintaining the EU institutions’ multilingualism as a relay language.

### **3. The status of English after Brexit**

Brexit is a term born with the UK referendum, held in June 2016. In this referendum, the citizens of the UK voted to present their views about leaving or staying in the EU. Since then, Brexit has been researched in relation with many policy areas of the EU and its possible effects have also been discussed from different perspectives.

The turnout of the referendum was 72.2% and according to it, 51.9% of the voters voted to leave the EU. Scotland (62%), Northern Ireland (55.8%) and London preferred to remain in the EU but it was not enough<sup>5</sup>. This referendum was a turning point for the EU history because it was the first time a member state preferred to leave and voted for leaving. There were many statements and a lot of news related to this point of view. Some of these are: “Brexit is a momentous event in the history of Europe and, from now on, the narrative will be one of disintegration not integration” (Grant, 2016), „the most important moment since the fall of the Berlin Wall” (BBC, 2016). These were just some of the views and the future of the EU was discussed more frequently with concepts like disintegration.

Prime Minister Cameron resigned after the referendum and Theresa May became the new Prime Minister on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2016. The leaving process started with Theresa May’s application in accordance with Article 50 of the Treaty of European Union at the end of March 2017. But she could not complete the process because the withdrawal agreement, which was prepared by the EU and British negotiators, was rejected 3 times by the House of Commons (Senedd Research, 2019). These rejections led to the resignation of Theresa May. Now, Boris Johnson

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<sup>4</sup> European Parliament, EP Translators (retrieved from [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/files/organisation-and-rules/multilingualism/en-ep\\_translators.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/files/organisation-and-rules/multilingualism/en-ep_translators.pdf)).

<sup>5</sup> The Economist (2016), Britain votes to leave the EU, 24 July (retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2016/06/24/britain-votes-to-leave-the-eu>).

conducts the process and the House of Commons accepted the withdrawal agreement (Stewart, 2019). There are still some steps to be taken. But Boris Johnson is so target-oriented that he wants to finish the process, with or without an agreement, as soon as possible. After the necessary steps are taken, Brexit will be rather reality than a simple phenomenon.

This research is aimed to see what the status of the English will be after Brexit. Many things may change when Brexit is fulfilled and the language policy will be one of them. There are different views in relation to the status of English. But here, it is evaluated in parallel with the previous parts. So, it is aimed to find an answer to the question of what the status of English will be at the individual, societal level and especially, at the institutional level.

At the individual level, it is difficult to say that there may be a change as English is not just the most widely spoken foreign language in the EU but it is also one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. According to James Lane (2019), 379 million people speak English as a native language and 753 million people speak it as a second (foreign) language and this makes English one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. It is generally accepted as a *lingua franca*. According to Jennifer Jenkins (2015, p. 50), the concept of *English as Lingua Franca* started to be researched in the second half of the 1990s; before that, the concept of *English as a foreign language* was used. What a *lingua franca* actually means can be explained with Jenkins's definition who refers to it as a common language of choice among speakers who come from different linguacultural backgrounds" (Jenkins, 2009, p. 200). This kind of use of English can be clearly seen within the EU, as it is the most preferred second language in the EU. Even though full multilingualism is promoted and supported by the EU, Europeans think that English (67%) is the most useful language to know and, after English, the next two languages are German (17%) and French (16%) (Eurobarometer, 2012, p. 69). Here, it is clear that the citizens of the EU think that English is useful or beneficial for them, so they prefer to learn English as the second or as a foreign language. It is obvious that the gap between the rate of English and the other two languages cannot be closed easily. This is not just the situation within the EU but it is also a global trend. Many people prefer to learn English as a foreign language in the world and, for that reason, it would not be wrong to state that the status of English at the individual level will not change even if the UK leaves the EU. When the status of English is thought of at the societal level, it should also be noted that it is closely related with individual multilingualism but there will be a change at the societal level because, after Brexit, the demography of the Union will change. According to Ginsburgh and Moreno-Terner (2018, p. 1775), after Brexit, 60 million native speakers will leave the EU and the leading languages in the EU will change. German and English will share the leading language status with 28%, and French will follow them with 21% (Ginsburgh and Moreno Terner, 2018, p. 1775). Even though English will be sharing its leading status, it should not be forgotten that this

percentage is without the UK's presence in the EU. So, English still has an important status even though it is not in the Union. According to Ginsburgh and Moreno-Ternero's (2019, p. 10) analysis, after Brexit, German and French will be the options for a new *lingua franca* and they claim that "German has slightly stronger arguments" for being the new *lingua franca*.

There are different views about the future status of English in the EU institutions after Brexit. One side believes that nothing will change after Brexit while the other side believes there will be a change. For example, at the institutional level, it is believed that nothing will change after Brexit because of the importance of English and due to other member states, like Ireland and Malta, whose one of the official languages is English. The German EU commissioner noted that „We have a series of member states that speak English, and English is the world language which we all accept” (Boyle, 2016). According to another piece of news, there is no plan to reduce the use of English and its services like “translation and interpretation will remain the same” (Mohdin, 2018). However, there are also people who think that English will lose its importance and dominance within the EU after the UK, which notified English as an official language, leaves. Some examples which support this view are: a French presidential candidate, Jean-Luc Melenchon, stated that “English can no longer be the third working language of the European parliament”, a chairwoman of the European Parliament's constitutional affairs committee, Danuta Hübner, said that „English is our official language because it has been notified by the UK. If we don't have the UK, we don't have English,” and, according to another statement, English might remain a „working language” but, to continue to be the official language, a unanimous decision would be needed (Boyle, 2016). Here, the question of whether a member state can notify more than one official language arises as very important. As a EU source stated, according to the 1958 Regulation, the French version “tends to conclude that this might be possible, whereas the English version appears to rule this out” (Goulard, 2016). So, it should be decided which version of the regulation will be paid attention to in order to shed light on this subject. Ginsburgh and Moreno-Ternero (2019, p. 4) claim that each member state can notify only one language. It is really important to answer the question of whether a member state can notify more than one official language. If it is possible, then, Ireland or Malta may notify it as their official language within the EU.

It can be said that there are two options: one of them is to leave English as an official language of the EU and the other one is not to. But it is not a simple choice because of the rather unclear legislation. There is no regulation about automatic change of status of EU official languages neither when a candidate becomes a member state nor when a member state leaves the EU. Therefore, this ambiguity should be clarified within the legislation.

Here, it is also crucial to be noted that the only institution which will decide on the status of English as an official language after Brexit is the Council. And the Council must make this decision unanimously, and both Malta and Ireland will still

EU members. So, if this issue comes to the Council, they will not vote for changing the status of English as English is one of their official languages and it is also spoken more than Irish in Ireland. Consequently, most Irish people will prefer English as a communication language with the EU institutions when they need it and the institutions must reply in that language if it is the official language of the EU. This also means that most official documents will continue to be translated into English and that EU citizens who prefer to use English will still have an option to use it as a communication language with the EU institutions. However, Ginsburgh and Moreno-Ternero (2019, pp. 4-5) claim that countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Poland or Spain will not accept to keep English as one of the official languages of the EU because especially Germany and France believe that their own language is overshadowed by English. Therefore, when this issue comes to the Council to be voted, there may be two blocking groups: Ireland and Malta as the first group which may oppose the drop of the status of English as an official language and the second group consisting of France and Germany which may come against the continuation of the status of English as an official language.

To sum up this section, it can be noted that, even if it is a weak possibility, the status of English at the institutional level may change. Even though the unofficial use of English within the institutions of the EU may remain almost the same as the current one, the official status of English as an official language of the EU may change because it was not notified as an official language by any other member state except the UK. If the protection of its current status is aimed, either amendments should be made in the regulations or member states should apply to notify it as an official language. When the UK leaves the EU, the official status of English should change, as the regulation is clear: a member state must apply to notify its official language as the official language of EU. But there are different views about whether a member state can apply for its second official language to be the official language of the EU. Even though this is not clear, it should not be forgotten that the issues related to the official languages are decided unanimously and so, member states will decide about English, as well. This means that it will be voted in the Council, in which Ireland and Malta will be the supporter of their official language even if they notified their other official languages, which are Irish and Maltese. But on the other hand, countries such as Germany and France may oppose it as they most probably want their official languages to gain prominence within the EU. Lastly, it should also be noted that if English continues to be the official language of the EU, they will have two of their official languages as the official language of the EU and as Ginsburgh, Moreno-Ternero and Weber (2017, p. 147) argue, this “may trigger other countries (or regions) to get their language accepted” as an official language. This will have economic outcomes because of translation and interpretation costs.

## Conclusions

The EU is a multilingual union with 24 official languages and many other indigenous regional and minority languages. Its language policy started to be shaped with the Treaty of Rome and the first Regulation was about official and working languages of the EU. From then on, the language policy of the EU has been changed and reshaped with the enlargements and the needs of the EU.

Multilingualism is part of the EU language policy and institutional multilingualism, which is the main focus point of this paper, is part of multilingualism. The EU institutions are multilingual in general and all official languages can be evaluated on equal footing but in practice, some of the official languages are preferred to the detriment of others. The most preferred official language is English. It is also one of the most widely spoken foreign languages by the citizens of the EU and the most widely used working languages, beside French and German, in the EU institutions. Moreover, English is one of the key languages, which has a role in maintaining the multilingualism of the EU institutions as a relay language. And it should not be forgotten that it is generally accepted as a *lingua franca* not just in the EU but also in the world.

After Brexit it can be said that the status of English will not change within the Union for the citizens, as it is one of the most preferred foreign language both in the EU and in the world. Its status as an official language may change according to the current regulation as only the UK applied for notifying English as one of the official languages of the EU. Ireland and Malta, as the other two member states which have English as an official language, applied for their other official languages to be notified as an official language of the EU. But the regulation is not clear as to whether a member state can apply for its second language or not. Consequently, there should be a change in the regulation to make it clear and to leave no room for doubt. There should also be an amendment to maintain its status. But there is no legal point stating that, after the exit of a member state, its official language will automatically lose its official status. Besides, it should not be forgotten that Ireland and Malta are member states of the EU and that the decisions related to the languages of the EU are decided in the Council acting unanimously.

In short, there are two possible outcomes for the status of English in the EU institutions. The first one is that in which English will maintain its status in the EU as an official language as there is no automatic system for dropping the official status of a language after the member state which notified it leaves the EU. The second possible outcome is that in which the status of English will change after Brexit but to provide this, clarification within the EU legislation is needed. The status of English in the EU institutions is unique because it is accepted as a *lingua franca* in general and there are also two other member states whose official language is also English. Here, an important question can be asked: what will happen if another member state, whose official language is not a *lingua franca* and there is no other

member state using it as an official language leaves? Will the EU continue to use it as an official language? The answer is possibly no because of cost effectiveness and many other reasons. Therefore, the EU legislation about the official languages should be amended in order to clarify the status of a language after a member state leaves the EU. If the legislation is not amended and English continues to be used as the official language of the EU, other states, with more than one official language, may want to notify their other official languages and this will have economic outcomes.

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