

Is There a Real Way for English to Retain Its Primacy Across the EU?

By [Grete Mautner](#)

Global Research, September 12, 2018

[New Eastern Outlook](#) 11 September 2018

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [History](#)

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

If one is to take a look at EU's language policies, we note numerous attempts to reduce the acute challenges faced by this multinational and multilingual community to the primacy of English does not make the present layout any more democratic, since this primacy grants a number of privileges to the UK and US that may be barely visible, but at the same time remain very real. These days, the European Union uses three languages as its "procedural" languages - English, German and French, along with a total of 21 other official languages. All decisions taken by official bodies of the EU are translated into all of these, while all EU citizens are entitled to the right of making appeals to the bodies of the union in their own language to receive a response properly translated in any of the 24 languages. However, more recently there's been an ever increasing number of calls in favor of abandoning English as the language of choice the EU, especially after Brexit. Thus, English may soon be reduced to the language of communication for journalists accredited across the EU and those lawyers working within the union. Quite possibly, a large number of officials from different countries will still use this language as a tool of communication, but it won't be anything near the present situation.

Unsurprisingly, those challenges face an acute threat among British and American political elites that have been elevating English while denigrating all other languages in a bid to promote English and American nationalism for well over a hundred years. This resulted in English becoming predominant at the international stage, to the point when one's attempts to protest against this situation may result in serious repercussions.

It's been noted that almost 400 million people speak it as their first language; a billion more know it as a secondary tongue. It is an official language in at least 59 countries, the unofficial lingua franca of dozens more.

It's curious that as early as in 1919, in his address to the American Defense Society Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed that

"we have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boardinghouse."

Against this backdrop, as the Trump administration intensifies its crackdown on migrants, speaking any language besides English has taken on a certain charge.

However, as the development of the international community carries on, Washington and London find themselves no longer capable of dictating their outlook on the international politics and trade to the rest of the world. In this situation the European Union doesn't feel compelled to listen to those forces that they it's getting increasingly frustrated with, as there are new rules of engagement, under which the US and the UK can no longer speak from the position of moral superiority that was born of their World War II victory. As the events of the 1940s fade into the historical distance, English-speaking societies' more recent intellectual and moral failures gain relative importance.

It's been noted that in a world where Germany and France no longer feels compelled to follow American or British «advice» on security and trade policy, the tension is no longer just between liberal and illiberal societies. It's also between different models of democracy, statehood and social protection. Thanks to Brexit and Trump, the debate may be getting more acrimonious, but perhaps also more exciting because more alternatives are now on the table.

In some countries, such as France and Israel, special linguistic commissions have been working for decades to stem the English tide by creating new coinages of their own.

As the UK is proceeding with its painful divorce with the European Union, there's an ever increasing number of arguments being made about what language should enjoy primacy within the latter. In its recent revelation the Wall Street Journal would [announce](#):

The French president, Emmanuel Macron, wants to make French grand again and replace English as the default language in EU institutions, the way it was before Britain joined the bloc in 1973. With the UK negotiating to leave the EU next spring, he is eager to restore the linguistic ancient regime.

Among Makron's leading allies in the battle for the restoration of the status of the French language one may find such prominent figures as the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, a native of the neighboring Luxembourg, who has recently begun to deliver his public statements in French and German.

This, according to several sources, is nothing short of a violation of the long-established tradition of addressing European PMs in three languages, including English. As early as 2016, the chairman of the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, Danuta Hübner, stated that after Brexit English will lose its status of the official language of the EU. An ever increasing number of European officials have also noted that across the EU the focus is on the more extensive use of French and German. Even though these days English remains the second language of choice for students across the EU, things may change pretty drastically over the course of the next couple decades. It's clear that Brexit will trigger an inevitable decline in the worldwide use of English. If today it is the official language of 12.8% of the 511 million population of the EU, after the departure of Britain it will be nothing more than a second official language of two member states – Ireland and Malta.

As the British government grapples with the fraught policy questions that leaving the union raises, the Anglosphere is a balm for those same Euroskeptics, who argue that Britain should just strike out on its own and make its own trade deals with some of the world's leading economies, including the United States, Australia and New Zealand, as well as rising

Asian powers like India. In reality, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand show no inclination to join Britain in new political and economic alliances, with them being more likely to remain indifferent to, or just perplexed by, Britain's calls for some kind of formalized Anglosphere alliance.

As the turn of events show the primacy that English has been enjoying for so long as the only means of international communication was a sign of bitter injustice for most European states and peoples.

*

Grete Mautner is an independent researcher and journalist from Germany, exclusively for the online magazine "[New Eastern Outlook](#)."

Featured image is from the author.

The original source of this article is [New Eastern Outlook](#)
Copyright © [Grete Mautner](#), [New Eastern Outlook](#), 2018

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Grete Mautner](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca