



13th December 2018

The European Language Equality Network (ELEN), with its Welsh, Scottish, Irish and Cornish member organisations, has issued the following joint statement regarding our concerns about the potentially disastrous effect of Brexit on the Celtic languages.

ELEN works to protect and promote European minoritised languages. It represents 45 languages with 150 member organisations in 23 European states.

Joint Statement on the effect of Brexit on the Celtic languages.

The devolved governments have, for the most part, been strong supporters of the Celtic languages, linguistic diversity and our shared cultural heritage. It is vital that these institutions, as well as the UK Government, continue to act to support the Celtic languages, most of which are defined as endangered and need support for their revitalization, while the UK Parliament decides on whether to accept the Government's draft withdrawal agreement, or decide on no-deal, or to remain in the EU.

Brexit will have a profoundly negative effect for all of the Celtic languages spoken in the UK. These language communities in Wales, Scotland, the north of Ireland, and Cornwall are faced not only with losing direct funding via programmes such as Erasmus Plus, Creative Europe and Horizon 2020, but also significant funding structural funds such as the Social Fund, Interreg, Growth, LEADER and EAFRD, all of which have created sustainable employment for Celtic language speakers in sectors such as agriculture, fishing, tourism and higher education. Outside the Common Agricultural Policy, agriculture and the rural economy will face huge challenges – and these are extremely important sectors where Celtic language speakers live and work.

The exchange of information, the flow of ideas and the connections made between individuals, organizations and institutions over the past forty years have greatly enriched the knowledge base and the transfer of best practice in language revitalization across our communities.

The UK Government has said that existing funding will be guaranteed only until 2020. In addition, with a no-deal Brexit, there will be the huge loss of access to the European markets

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with the potential of trade tariffs and border controls which will affect all economic sectors. For our language communities it is vital that our governments make the case for the economic well-being of these communities and to ensure that we continue to receive the support that we need to ensure the long-term sustainability of our languages and cultures. Many of our language communities exist in areas suffering from higher levels of deprivation and will be disproportionately affected by negative impacts of Brexit on a political, economic and cultural level.

Welsh will be particularly badly affected as so much of rural and urban Wales receives EU funding. For example, under WTO rules lamb exports will be taxed by an extra 40%, meaning that Welsh hill farmers' livelihoods will be severely affected, and considering that most of these farmers live their lives through the medium of Welsh and that they underpin the fabric of rural Welsh-speaking society.

In the north of Ireland cross-border funding programmes such as PEACE IV, Leader and Interreg will all be discontinued, all of which are used to support Irish language projects. In terms of continuing support for the language, our governments must help the Irish language community to ensure that language planning and development continues on an all-Ireland basis, help ensure that any potential new border rules have no impact on Irish language funding, planning and development, and uphold the Good Friday Agreement which underpins the peace process.

Over the last few years Irish language groups have increased their participation in European funded projects, many of those groups will now be disqualified from applying because they are located in the north. It will also affect groups in the south who would be making joint applications with groups in the north, and who will be delivering projects through the medium of Irish. Many of these projects will no longer be viable.

The cooperation between the Gaelic groups in Ireland and Scotland not only involves ongoing cross-border activity but also initiatives which fall under the remit of the British Irish Council as enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. For example, the language promotion body, Foras na Gaeilge, operates on an all-Ireland basis, again a legacy of the Good Friday Agreement. In addition, Irish-language promotion in Northern Ireland relies significantly on ongoing contacts with the vernacular speaker communities in the Gaeltacht regions in the Irish Republic and on institutional supports from various language agencies and educational and corpus planning bodies.

In Scotland, Gaelic benefits from a wide range of direct and indirect European funding including Leader, ERDF and Erasmus, all of which will be lost - and in a country which voted to Remain.

Cornwall benefits from Convergence funding which acted to support the language, culture and infrastructure projects, and which is vital now that UK Government funding has been cut

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completely for the language. Convergence funding, as well as ERDF, ESF, and the European Fisheries Fund, all important for the Cornish economy, will also be cut completely with no replacement so far mentioned from the UK Government.

Furthermore, in terms of language rights and national minority protection, we will be excluded from the various rights afforded to speakers of minoritised languages upheld in the Lisbon Treaty and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, for example.

It is a situation that we find unacceptable, and coming at a time where we are doing crucial work to revitalize Irish, Welsh, Gaelic and Cornish.

Based on the reasons outlined above, and on what we consider to be the best course of action to protect, nurture and develop our languages and language rights, we call on the UK Government, the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Senedd and Konsel Kernow to support remaining in the European Union.

Signature organisations:

Ciarán Mac Giolla Bhéin, Conradh na Gaeilge.

Dòmhnall MacNèill Commun na Gàidhlig.

Bethan Roberts, Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg.

Davyth Hicks, European Language Equality Network.

Maureen Pierce, Kesva an Taves Kernewek.

Loveday Jenkin, Kowethas an Yeth Kernewek.

Elin Haf Gruffydd Jones, Mercator Media.

Ceri Owen, Rhieni dros Addysg Gymraeg.

Sioned Haf, Mudiad Dathlu'r Gymraeg.

Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, Soillse.

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