

《英国脱欧后，英语也要脱欧？》

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After Brexit, French Politicians Want English Language Out Of EU Too



PHILIPPE HUGUEN/GETTY IMAGES

Is the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union going to deal a fatal blow to the language of Shakespeare on the continent? English, one of the 24 official languages of the EU, is very much spoken in Brussels and in the European Parliament in Strasbourg. But according to certain leading French politicians, its status after the Brexit should be questioned.

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On Friday morning, the mayor of the southern French town of Béziers, Robert Ménard — a man with close ties to the National Front — reckoned that English no longer had “any legitimacy” in Brussels.

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Left-wing presidential candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who supports moving away from European treaties, has, for

his part, said that English can no longer be “the third working language” of the European Parliament.

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In various ways, they're both wrong. The very complex operation of multilingualism in European institutions doesn't rely on the single criterion of a member state's membership in — or withdrawal from — the EU.

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The EU's official languages are communicative languages recognized by the institutions. At the inception of the European structure, during the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951, there were four: French, German, Italian and Dutch. Today there are 24 of these official languages, including Bulgarian, Danish, Croatian and, obviously, English. In the European Parliament, all documents and discussions must be translated simultaneously into the 24 languages.

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The official language of a member state doesn't automatically become an official language of the EU (as is notably the case with Luxembourgish). This recognition happens at the request of the state. If a state withdraws, its language might also be withdrawn, even if a case for it was never made.

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Nevertheless, Great Britain's exit should not be enough to abolish the use of English in Brussels, contrary to what Robert Ménard thinks. That is quite simply because the English language is one of the official languages of Ireland and Malta, who are still members of the EU.

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Jean-Luc Mélenchon's proposal is subtler because the European MP is targeting English not in its capacity as an official language, but as a working language. To enable the fluidity of exchanges within the EU, certain discussions led by certain institutions happen in a limited number of languages. Contrary to what the presidential candidate asserts, this isn't the case during sessions of the European Parliament (except for press conferences). The European Commission, however, does have three official working languages: French, German and English.

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This linguistic choice is clearly tied to member states' influence, but it also follows practical concerns and historical traditions. Deliberation in the European Union Court of Justice takes place in French, as do the majority of discussions in the European Court of Auditors.

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So although the U.K. doesn't use the euro and has preserved its monetary sovereignty, the European Central Bank has, since its creation, always and exclusively used the English language. And this is not for London's sake, but for the sake of not complicating its extremely sensitive communication by multiplying the channels of translation.

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