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МЕЃУНАРОДНО СПИСАНИЕ ЗА ЛИНГВИСТИЧКИ, КНИЖЕВНИ И КУЛТУРОЛОШКИ ИСТРАЖУВАЊА

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EU MULTILINGUALISM AND THE LANGUAGES OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES: AN EXPLORATORY OVERVIEW

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Abstract: This article provides a literature-based exploratory overview of how the European Union (EU) might deal with the linguistic challenges of incorporating the official languages of the Eastern Partnership countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – into its wider activities. In the first instance, the EU's core concepts of multilingualism and language equality are outlined. This is subsequently complemented by a summary of the current linguistic situation regarding the Eastern Partnership countries and the potential implications of wider use of their languages for the EU's translation and interpreting services, as well as suggestions for further research on the topic.

Keywords: *European Union; translation; interpreting; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Georgia; Moldova; Ukraine.*

Introduction

Following the United Kingdom's departure from the organisation on 31 January 2020, the European Union (EU) now consists of twenty-seven full member states.[1] In addition, five further countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Turkey) have official candidate status. In terms of geography, therefore, the EU's enlargement-related activities are thus focused on the western Balkans. However, through the Eastern Partnership, a series of agreements have been forged with six post-Soviet countries located to the east of the EU's borders – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus,[2] Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Given the distinct paucity of relevant literature centring on translation and interpreting-related aspects of

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[1] These are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Republic of Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden.

[2] At the time of writing, Belarus is still a formal member of the Eastern Partnership, but EU sanctions have been in place since 2020 (European Council 2021).

the issue, this article aims to provide a snapshot of the linguistic situation as it currently exists between the EU and the six nations of the Eastern Partnership. As such, it builds directly on the author's previous work (Hoyte-West, 2021), which examined how Albanian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, and Serbian – as the official languages of the four western Balkan candidate countries – might be incorporated into the EU's language services. In terms of the present contribution, this is done firstly by outlining the key importance of multilingualism to the EU and its institutions, before defining the research question and data sources used. Subsequently, relevant aspects relating to the current linguistic situation between the EU and the six Eastern Partnership countries are highlighted with particular regard to the implications for the EU's translation and interpreting services. Finally, given the exploratory nature of this overview, pointers for further research on the topic are offered.

EU multilingualism and linguistic equality

Despite calls for an "English–only" Europe (Phillipson, 2003), the EU institutions remain bastions of multilingualism in a world where English is increasingly dominant. Uniquely among international organisations, the EU also boasts twenty–three other official languages, and is founded on the premise that all of its official languages are of equal status. This principle of linguistic equality was enshrined over 60 years ago in the Treaty of Rome (Regulation 1, 1958), and over time, the number of official EU languages has increased from four to 24[3] (European Parliament, 2021). This reflects the wider political developments of recent years, where the number of EU member states has grown significantly. By way of example, ten new member states joined in 2004,[4] followed by Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and subsequently Croatia in 2013. Accordingly, each enlargement always brings new linguistic challenges (European Commission, 2007a; 2007b). When a new country begins the accession process, its government usually makes a request that its official language is recognised at the EU level, which is then subsequently added to the list of official EU languages once the accession has taken place. This can also be done at a later stage – for example, as noted elsewhere (Hoyte-West, 2019), the Irish government requested official EU status for Irish only in the early 2000s, after the Republic of Ireland had already been a EU member state for several decades.

To ensure multilingual communication between MEPs, EU civil servants, and ordinary citizens (European Commission, 2021a), the EU institutions have a large cadre – running into the thousands – of highly-trained translators and conference interpreters (for more information see Benedetti, 2011; Cosmai, 2014;

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[3] The official EU languages are Bulgarian, Croatian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, and Swedish.

[4] These were Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

Bartłomiejczyk, 2020). They are all skilled polyglots typically working from a range of languages into their mother tongue, and work together with teams of proof-readers, terminologists, lawyer-linguists, and other language specialists (European Personnel Selection Office, 2021). Indeed, when preparing for a new EU official language to be added, significant investments are made in language training and development. Yet everything, as always, depends on the necessary political will. As shown by the case of Icelandic in the 2010s, linguistic and other preparations may ultimately come to nothing (European Commission, 2017).

It is unsurprising, therefore, that EU multilingualism policy has been the object of significant scholarly debate, particularly after the 2004 enlargement. This has included discussions on the management and impact of large-scale institutional multilingualism (e.g. Ammon, 2006; de Swaan, 2007), as well as studies relating to linguistic equality and the growing dominance of English in the EU institutions (e.g. Gazzola & Grin, 2013; Gazzola, 2016), including the potential role of that language after Brexit (Kużelewska, 2019, 2020). However, comparatively few analyses to date (e.g. Pym, 2000) have specifically explored the impact of future EU enlargements and additional official EU languages on institutional translation and interpreting provision.

Methodology and research question

As noted in the introductory section, the aim of this study is to give an exploratory translation and interpreting-focused overview of the current linguistic situation between the EU and the six countries comprising the Eastern Partnership. Hence, the following research question was posited:

– How will the EU's translation and interpreting services potentially accommodate the languages of the Eastern Partnership countries in their activities?

In a similar vein to previously-mentioned work on the western Balkans (Hoyte-West, 2021), a literature-based approach was selected. As noted elsewhere (e.g. Palmatier, Houston, & Hulland, 2017; Snyder, 2019) it was observed that, given the novel nature of the topic, this perspective would be valuable in contributing to current knowledge within the field, whilst acknowledging limitations compared to a more empirical approach. In addition, this literature-based focus emulates previous studies which have explored various aspects of institutional language policies in the EU context (e.g. Ó Riain 2010; Łachacz & Mańko 2013; Hoyte-West 2020a).

With the intersection of EU multilingualism and the Eastern Partnership countries still to attract wider academic attention, a significant amount of the data for this study were obtained from publicly available sources, including the websites of the translation and interpreting directorates of the various EU institutions, as well as the websites of relevant local delegations of the EU's diplomatic service, the European External Action Service. This information was supplemented by trusted media sources such as specialist news magazines and websites dedicated to Eastern European topics.

The EU and the languages of the Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership forms part of the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy, an initiative which also includes the bloc's relations with sixteen countries to the east and south of the European Union's borders (European Commission, 2020a). Founded in 2009 with the aim of deepening bilateral relations (Latoszek & Kłos, 2016, p.180), the Eastern Partnership currently comprises the following six former Soviet nations:

Country	Population (2020 estimate)	Official language(s)
Armenia	2,954,000	Armenian
Azerbaijan	10,108,000	Azerbaijani[1]
Belarus	9,407,000	Belarusian, Russian
Georgia	3,715,000	Georgian
Moldova	3,022,000	Romanian
Ukraine	44,237,000	Ukrainian

Table: Relevant data regarding the Eastern Partnership countries.
Source: The author, based on Pavlenko (2008) & Encyclopaedia Britannica (2021).

Of the seven official languages featured in the table above, four belong to the Indo-European linguistic family: Belarusian, Russian, and Ukrainian belong to the western branch of the Slavonic languages, whereas Armenian is the only member of its own branch. Georgian is a Kartvelian language, and Azerbaijani is a member of the Turkic language family (Comrie, 2009a, p.11; Comrie, 2009b, p.269). Five of the Eastern Partnership nations have one sole official language, thus giving an impression of linguistic homogeneity in line with wider concepts of normative ethnolinguistic nationalism (see Kamusella, 2018a). The only country with two official languages is Belarus, where, as outlined in Zeller & Sitchinava (2019, p.110), in practice Russian predominates in most areas of public life, as well as increasingly in the private sphere too. However, as Kamusella (2021a, 2021b) notes, it can be argued that the use of Belarusian is actively discouraged by the state for political reasons. As such, in all six of the nations, it can be argued that the selection of the official language(s) does not fully reflect each country's specific linguistic and ethnic composition. For example, as Pavlenko (2008, pp.278-282) illustrates, there are also the profound social, political, and cultural ramifications from many years of Russian rule, firstly under the Russifying influences of the tsars, and subsequently by the Soviet Union, where Russian was promoted as the country's interethnic lingua franca. In addition, there are also other languages spoken in the six nations that do not have official status. Indeed, in the case of the Caucasus, the dozens of various tongues spoken in the region led it to be described as the "mountain of languages" (Catford, 1977, p.283). And finally, interlinked with the aforementioned notions of ethnolinguistic homogeneity, no overview of any current situation concerning the Eastern Partnership countries

could be complete without alluding to the complex geopolitical situations that have emerged since the fall of the Soviet Union. As has been extensively described elsewhere (e.g. O'Loughlin, Kolossov, & Toal, 2014; Fischer, 2016; Minakov, 2019), in several instances this has led to (frozen) conflicts and the declaration of largely unrecognised states such as Abkhazia and Transnistria, typically with their own official languages.

Thus, building on this complex contextualisation, it is both interesting and relevant to examine how the EU's language services will accommodate deeper cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries and their languages. As has been highlighted, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are all linked by a common Soviet heritage, but also are very different in size, culture, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition, as well as in political outlook and orientation. From the EU's perspective, participation in the Eastern Partnership is not part of any EU accession process (European External Action Service, 2019a), but is rather representative of a move towards greater mutual cooperation. By way of example, these include Association Agreements, Association Agendas, Partnership Priorities, as well as the so-called 20 Deliverables for 2020. Together, these aim to strengthen the economies, governance, connectivity and societies of the six relevant nations, as well as highlight the importance of specific aspects relating to gender issues, wider civil society, as well as to communications and strategy (European External Action Service, 2021).

Such cooperation agreements mean that there are already bi- and multilateral meetings that may require interpretation, as well as important documents that need to be translated. Indeed, in some cases, preparations on ensuring adequate translations of the *acquis communautaire* – the body of legislation comprising the core of EU law – have already begun. For example, a workshop held in Kyiv in 2019 aimed to ensure that the various legal terms associated with the EU are translated correctly and consistently into Ukrainian (European External Action Service, 2019b, 2019c). Such initiatives are also bolstered by the good framework of relevant translation and interpreting degree programmes offered by universities in the Eastern Partnership countries, a legacy of the long domestic tradition of multilingualism from Soviet times (for more information, see Brisset, 2013). Therefore, it is clear that the EU's language services should not be in the same position they were in with regard to the recognition of Irish as an official EU language in 2007, when there was no domestic interpreter training course available in the Republic of Ireland (Hoyte-West, 2020b).[5]

At present, the EU's current international initiatives relating to translator and interpreter training do not include any members from the Eastern Partnership countries. In terms of cooperation with universities outside of the EU, however, the current iteration of the European Master's in Translation consortium lists an institutional member from Lebanon (European Commission, 2021b), and the

[5] Indeed, a shortage of qualified Irish-language linguists means that there is still a derogation in force regarding the full implementation of Irish in the EU institutions.

European Commission's DG Interpretation cooperates regularly with relevant training programmes in a range of non-EU countries, including China, Cuba, Ghana, Mozambique, and the Russian Federation (European Commission, 2021c). As such, given that the translation and interpreting services of the different EU institutions are thus well-versed in collaborating with training institutions outside of the EU, there is no reason for this not to be extended to institutions based in Eastern Partnership countries at a future date. This cooperation guarantees quality, as well as allowing lecturers and students greater familiarity with the rigorous testing and accreditation procedures that the EU institutions have for in-house and freelance translators and conference interpreters (see Cosmai, 2014, pp.111-2; European Commission, 2020b; European Personnel Selection Office, 2021).

It is important to note, however, that the complex social, political, and linguistic context of each of the Eastern Partnership countries also brings its own potential logistical challenges for the EU's language services – be it the unique scripts of Armenian and Georgian, or, as Prina (2012) notes, the exact nomenclature Moldovans give to their state language, an issue that continues to cause controversy (Crowcroft, 2020). As highlighted previously, another factor, too, is the continuing relationship with the Russian language and its enduring role in the sociocultural frameworks of the Eastern Partnership countries. Although almost three decades have passed since the fall of the Soviet Union, the language of Pushkin still retains a degree of importance in the countries that emerged in its wake. Even though Russian is not an official EU language, it is an official language of the United Nations, and remains widely used in many Eastern Partnership countries. However, as hinted at before, many post-Soviet countries have mixed feelings about the wider use of the language. In addition, the situation is complicated further by the issue that, unlike other international languages such as English and French, Russian has only one accepted linguistic and literary standard – that is, the Russian as spoken in the Russian Federation (Kamusella, 2018b). Scholarly discussions about the monocentric nature of the language have included calls for the creation of so-called 'national' versions of Russian in certain post-Soviet countries, although opinions about the proposed sociolinguistic and socio-political merits of such initiatives remain divided (Kamusella, 2019a, 2019b; Moser, 2020).

Coda and suggestions for further research

As this article has outlined, there are a number of potential challenges anticipated by the possible future inclusion of the official languages of the Eastern Partnership countries in the EU's wider activities. However, as mentioned in the introduction to this article, the immediate enlargement-related focus of the EU's language services is on the languages of the western Balkans – i.e. Albanian, Bosnian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, and Serbian (Hoyte-West, 2021). Yet, as collaboration with Eastern Partnership countries continues to increase, it is clear that there will be a rising demand for translation and interpretation services

for their official languages at the EU level, especially given that the current governments of Georgia and Ukraine appear eager to submit applications for EU membership in the next few years (Lavrelashvili & Van Hecke, 2021; RFE/RL Ukrainian Service, 2021).

In terms of avenues for further research, these could include an analysis of the role and importance of translation and conference interpreting within the specific societies of the Eastern Partnership countries, as well as an examination of the education, training, and professional status of translators and interpreters in the given domestic markets. At the EU level, the usage and role of the official languages of the six Eastern Partnership countries could be explored in further detail, and attention could also be paid to the particular role played by the Russian language, not only in bi- and multilateral meetings, but also within the wider landscape of the translational professions in the Eastern Partnership countries. It is important to note, however, that the relationship between the EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership is in a constant state of flux. As stated previously, the necessary political will is crucial in order for greater cooperation to occur, given the laborious work of harmonising and aligning the various national systems and frameworks with EU approaches. Yet all of this is underpinned by language, the key means of communication. And although the future is always uncertain, what seems assured is that the EU will rise to the challenge of including the languages of the Eastern Partnership into its activities, thus remaining true to its founding principles of multilingualism and linguistic equality.

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