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Getting *Langue* Winded

How the European Union Language Policy Came to Be

Clinton R. Long

History 490, section 5

Dr. Mark Choate

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While many people remember hearing about the French Revolution slogan of *liberté, égalité et fraternité* ringing through the streets of Paris in the eighteenth century, fewer people remember hearing about similar ideals ringing through the streets of Brussels, Bonn, and other European capitals in the 1950s with regard to the language policy of a united Europe.¹ Even those familiar with the language policy of the European Union (EU) and its predecessors only talk about how the EU language policy is “*langue winded*” (*langue* means “language” in French) due to its inefficiencies without considering that these ideals—equality in particular—shaped the very language system they criticize.

A prime example of this type of criticism is Robert Phillipson’s *English-only Europe?* In it, he jokes that his book should be called “From Babel to Eurobabble,” implying that a continent of many tongues has produced a linguistically-inefficient bureaucracy.² Even the subtitle of his book—*Challenging Language Policy*—represents the vast majority of authors who challenge the current system, while very few choose to defend it or understand its origins. He continues later to criticize the fact that all official EU documents are translated into every official language:

It is unnecessary and impractical for all documents in the EU to be translated into every language, particularly those that are not going to take legal effect in member states. Constraints of time (tight deadlines) and expense (finite budgets, and pressure to increase productivity) also influence whether translations are available. . . . It is not really necessary to translate 450 pages on asparagus production into Swedish and Finnish, when the north European climate does not permit the growing of this crop.³

¹ The current result of “united Europe” is the European Union (EU). See footnote 7 for a brief explanation of the predecessors of the EU. Also, *liberté, égalité, et fraternité* translates to “liberty, equality, and fraternity.”

² Robert Phillipson, *English-only Europe? Challenging Language Policy* (London: Routledge, 2003), 3.

³ Phillipson, *English-only Europe?*, 120.

Others follow this same path, coining other clever phrases such as “Wanted: a European Community policy for languages, dead or alive,” “Is EU Lost in Translation?,” and “Can’t We All Just Get a *Langue*? A Better Language Policy for the European Union.”⁴ Whether one disputes the need to translate a long document on vegetable production, heckles other linguistic difficulties, or asks if having one official language would be better, the criticisms are not hard to find. These critics are justified; the language system creates serious bureaucratic quagmire in all areas of EU governance. As of 1 January 2007, the EU has twenty-seven member-states and twenty-three official languages.⁵ This creates an enormous amount of jobs for interpreters and translators. Yet as the unemployment rate for linguists decreases, the inefficiency of the EU increases. Interpretation of official meetings creates communication barriers best explained by a favorite observation of many EU politicians. They chide that when someone cracks a joke in a meeting, one hears multiple waves of laughter due to interpretation delays of the original message, traveling from the interpreters to the headphone-wearing politicians.

Simultaneous interpretation of official EU meetings is the least of the EU’s language problems. One greater difficulty is that translation of official documents must occur in all official languages, as Phillipson alludes to. This means that EU bodies cannot vote on certain bills for months due to translations of the original into every other official language. When a nine-

⁴ The first phrase comes from Nick Roche, “Multilingualism in European Community meetings – a pragmatic approach,” in Florian Coulmas, ed., *A Language Policy for the European Community: Prospects and Quandaries* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991), 139. The second phrase comes from James Owen, “With 20 Official Languages, Is EU Lost in Translation?” *National Geographic News*, 22 February 2005, at [http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/02/0222_050222_translation.html]. While it is not clear if Owen was the originator of this phrase, he is one of the many who has used it in publications. The third phrase is the title of a presentation given by the author at the University of Malta, 27 July 2006.

⁵ In the EU, “official language” means that all official documents and meetings will be translated and interpreted into that language. Also, a European citizen may write to the EU in an official language and receive an answer in the same language. These standards were set in 1958 with Regulation 1 of the Council. See [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2004/l_169/l_16920040501en00010002.pdf] for the exact wording. This is the revised version (2004) with twenty official languages listed. In 1958, the language policy was the same except that Dutch, French, German, and Italian were the only official languages.

hundred page bill is introduced—as was the case with a chemical registration bill from 2005—the affect that the policy has on legal efficiency (an oxymoron?) becomes very visible.⁶

While the critics are right, they focus only on these negative issues. They use their own definitions of “problem” and “inefficiency” to narrow-mindedly analyze the EU’s language policy. This tunnel vision is the critics’ biggest problem; what appears problematic or inefficient to some may be the result of years of strong efforts to promote certain ideals in spite of lost time or money. Contrary to what the naysayers often talk about, today’s EU language policy has never been concerned with efficiency or inefficiency. Policy makers have decided that efficiency in time and money is not as important as the equality each language deserves.⁷ By looking at the formation of a united Europe and its language policy, one sees that both are the result an ideal that echoed on the streets of Paris: equality. The desire for equality that motivated the founding fathers of the EU to create a united Europe also motivated them to create a fair language policy. These founding fathers’ decisions to create this equality-based policy explain its progression and current state of existence.

From Enemies to Equals

At the end of World War II, France and Germany—after another crippling war against each other—and the rest of Europe’s countries struggled to recover morally, economically, and politically. In the late 1940s, France recognized that punishing Germany to the extreme for its

⁶ Ian Hudghton, member of European Parliament, mentioned this while giving personal tour of European Parliament to a visitor and the author, late 2005.

⁷ The European Union has only been the official title of the European Communities since 1992 and the same idea or organization has been known by many different names throughout history. When I refer to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), I will be referring to the period of 1950 to 1957. The actual community continued to exist until 2002, but starting in 1957 I will use European Economic Community (EEC) to refer to the idea of a union of Europe. The EEC replaced the ECSC as the main European community with the Treaty of Rome in 1957, even though the ECSC continued to exist as a subsidiary of the EEC. For 1970 to 1991, I will refer to it as the European Community (EC). Then in 1992, the EC became the European Union (EU), what the organization is currently known as. As I refer to different time periods of European unity, I will maintain consistency by referring to the relevant organization (ECSC, EEC, and so forth). When I refer to the culmination of all the organizations, I will refer either to the “EU and its predecessors” or to the “European Communities.”

role in World War II would probably create increased friction and potentially produce another war between the two powers.⁸ Furthermore, the countries recognized that rebuilding themselves without working together might also lay the foundations for another conflict. Konrad Adenauer, West German chancellor at the time, echoed this feeling while referring to correspondence with French politician Robert Schuman, saying that both France and Germany feared a German revival and another war.⁹

To prevent this and to rebuild herself, France saw it necessary to generate—as French Minister of Planning Jean Monnet reflected—a “solution which would put French industry on the same footing as German industry, while freeing the latter from the discrimination born of defeat – that would restore the economic and political preconditions for the mutual understanding so vital to Europe as a whole. It could, in fact, become the germ of European unity.”¹⁰ Equality, not embarrassment, would define this post-war period and bring the powers out of the ashes together.

As these countries recognized the need for equality and unity among Europe’s enemies, they created a plan for uniting Europe. Known as the Schuman Plan, it was authored by Jean Monnet and delivered by French Minister of Foreign Affairs Robert Schuman on 9 May 1950. In his speech, Schuman echoed the desires of many to have some sort of union or agreement between Germany and France to promote a united and peaceful Europe. Schuman argued that a coal and steel community would provide a framework for the two countries to cooperate by sharing the very resources they had been fighting over and had used to fight each other. As the

⁸ This was a lesson that France probably learned from the aftermath of World War I. After this first war, the victors decided that seriously punishing Germany for her actions by almost completely dismantling her was the best option. This created a weak government that eventually became fertile soil for the rise of Nazism and Adolf Hitler, creating another world war.

⁹ Konrad Adenauer, *Memoirs 1945–1953*, trans. by Beate Ruhm von Oppen (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1966), 257.

¹⁰ Jean Monnet, *Memoirs*, trans. by Richard Mayne (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1978), 292–293.

Times reported, “The solidarity in production thus established will make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes, not merely unthinkable, but actually impossible.”¹¹ Two countries could not go to war with each other over resources they shared. A country would also find it difficult to invade another country with weapons produced and fueled by resources shared by both the invader and the invaded. By cooperating, the countries could—as Schuman said—“change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims.”¹²

While many argue that a nation-state always acts in ways that promote its own economic and political interests, post-war Europeans recognized that doing so could allow for another war. The countries did seek to improve their lot, but tried not to do so at the expense of the others. Thus they promoted equality and communal growth. The architects of a united Europe vehemently affirmed that the motives for such a community were not largely motivated by any one country seeking political or economical advantages over the rest. Chancellor Adenauer mentioned this when explaining the potential partnership to the German Bundestag (parliament) on 13 June 1950: “Let me make a point of declaring in so many words and in full agreement, not only with the French Government but also with M. Jean Monnet, that the importance of this project is above all political and not economic.”¹³

Here Adenauer introduced a vital element to understanding the purpose of a united Europe. Upon trying to guess the motives of a community based on shared resources, one might assume that the motives were purely economical. It makes sense economically for countries to help each other by sharing resources and thus prevent financially-crippling wars. However,

¹¹ “Franco-German Steel and Coal Control,” *Times* (London), 10 May 1950, 6.

¹² Robert Schuman, “Declaration of 9 May 1950.” Originally given on 9 May 1950. From the Web portal of the European Union, at [http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/9-may/decl_en.htm].

¹³ Monnet, *Memoirs*, 320–321, no source cited for the original.

Adenauer argued that the importance of a European community was political, meaning that a political community of cooperation would stop the members from fighting another war.

Adenauer's statement takes on more legitimacy when Monnet (a Frenchman) also emphasized similar hopes for the community. He often reminded critics with statements such as: "We are here . . . to undertake a common task – not to negotiate for our own national advantage, but to seek it in the advantage of all."¹⁴ France, as (technically) a victor in World War II and the creator of the Schuman Plan, could have easily tried to dominate the new community. However, Monnet recognized this here and in personal correspondence with Robert Schuman that France would seek to be very involved, not dominating, in the new coal and steel agreement.¹⁵

With these statements, Adenauer and Monnet promoted an understanding of what motivated the desires for a united Europe: equality and cooperation. With these ideals in mind, Monnet, Adenauer, Schuman, and others continued to create the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). The organization would provide an environment where Europe—based on unity and equality—could provide peace and prosperity for all those involved. After deliberation and coordination, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands agreed upon an ECSC treaty in April 1951, which became applicable in July 1952. While not without disputes, troubles, or differing interests, the ECSC prevented war between the six members and set the foundations for a more deeply united Europe.

¹⁴ Monnet, *Memoirs*, 323.

¹⁵ Mémorandum de Jean Monnet à Robert Schuman, written 9 September 1950 (Paris), from *Jean Monnet – Robert Schuman: Correspondance* (Correspondence), 1947–1953 (Lausanne, Switzerland: Fondation Jean Monnet pour l'Europe et Centre de recherches européennes, 1986), 55.

Envisioning an Enduring Europe

Providing a framework for peace between Europe's countries reflected deep optimism and high expectations and it was not the founding fathers' intention to end the process of European unity once the ECSC fulfilled its goals. Instead, the architects of the ECSC envisioned a Europe united by more than shared coal and steel. With the ECSC, they saw the formation of a Europe bound by deeper economic and political ties. Monnet eloquently added that the discussion of continued European unity was prevalent even in the late 1940s and early 1950s:

Looking back on this mid-century period, one can hardly fail to be struck by the extraordinary ferment in men's minds about the idea of European unity. The political parties and militant movements dealt with it in their manifestoes; statesmen discussed it in their speeches; articles were devoted to it in the press. The London *Times* and *The Economist* published admirable editorials worthy of Jay's, Madison's, and Hamilton's *Federalist Papers*. Re-reading all this, one has the feeling that so rich a current of thought could hardly fail to bring about European unity on the broadest front.¹⁶

In the Schuman Plan, Robert Schuman shared Monnet's vision and expressed what he and many of his colleagues felt: "The setting up of this powerful productive unit, open to all countries willing to take part and bound ultimately to provide all the member countries with the basic elements of industrial production on the same terms, will lay a true foundation for their

¹⁶ Monnet, *Memoirs*, 282–283. This brings up an interesting point. Monnet refers to two British publications here, even though Britain was not a part of the ECSC. It makes sense that Britain was not a member because it is more removed geographically from the area of conflict. However, the question delves deeper than this. When the six countries signed the Schuman Plan, Robert Schuman told a *Times* reporter that "his most earnest wish was that soon . . . the six countries might sign an additional agreement with Great Britain." ("Schuman Plan Pact Signed," *Times* [London], 19 April 1951, 3) Thus, the decision seems to have fallen with Britain. According to Oliver J. Daddow, Prime Minister Clement Attlee's government did not want to be a member of the ECSC. (From Oliver J. Daddow, *Britain and Europe since 1945: Historiographical perspectives on integration* [Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2004], 26–27.) Daddow's footnote for this quote implies that Britain feared being subject to the ECSC's High Authority. To this day, Britain is the most distanced country (politically) from the rest of the EU and seems more afraid of lost sovereignty than anyone. On page 27, Daddow continues to explain that Britain did not attempt to apply to the group until it applied to the EEC in the early 1960s. According to the British Broadcasting Corporation, Charles de Gaulle rejected the British application because "the British government lack[ed] commitment to European integration." (From British Broadcasting Corporation, "A timeline of the EU," at [<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3583801.stm>].) It became a member in 1973 along with Ireland and Denmark.

economic unification.”¹⁷ Chancellor Adenauer also realized this potential, saying on the day the countries agreed on the ECSC treaty that “The High Authority [the leadership of the ECSC] will contribute to creating the European spirit.”¹⁸ He did not mention the benefits for Germany or any other country, but chose instead to mention how much the ECSC would help move toward a European spirit.

Though there were struggles and political conflicts, the ECSC helped bring these countries together through sharing resources and promoting dialogue to the point where a true union was a real possibility. European leaders who hoped for further European unity through deepened economic ties saw their wishes granted in 1957. The same six members of the ECSC approved the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC) and signed their approval of the Treaty of Rome in March 1957. In the treaty, these six countries, being “[d]etermined to lay the foundations of an even closer union among the peoples of Europe, resolved to ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action to eliminate the barriers which divide Europe, . . . have decided to create a European Economic Community.”¹⁹ This solidified the economic ties between the countries and created an actual union that transcended the sharing of resources by creating bodies such as the European Court of Justice, the European Commission, and the European Council that would govern many aspects of the lives of those whose countries belonged to the EEC.

The purpose of this organization, as the treaty says, was to promote the continued growth of Europe through unity, equality, and a lack of dividing barriers. These principles were those

¹⁷ Schuman, “Declaration of 9 May 1950.” Originally given 9 May 1950. From the Web portal of the European Union, at [http://europa.eu/abc/symbols/9-may/decl_en.htm].

¹⁸ “Deux des artisans du traité nous disent leur satisfaction,” *Le Monde* (Paris), 20 April 1951, 3. All translations from French are mine unless otherwise noted.

¹⁹ “Treaty establishing the European Economic Community,” signed 25 March 1957, from preamble. From *Treaties establishing the European Communities* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1973), 174.

upon which successors of the EEC were based as well as the idea of a united Europe as it continued to grow. In 1970, the EEC's bodies, governing abilities, and economic ties were modified, creating an improved community that was then called the European Community (EC, and also often called the European Communities). The contemporary product of these evolutions is the EU, which became the new name of the improved and more fully integrated EC with the Maastricht Treaty of 1991. The EU has developed frameworks for common foreign policy, deeper economic cooperation, a common currency, borderless travel and trade, and other contributors to European unity.

Each of these progressions of European unity reflects the same ideals as did the treaty that established the ECSC, namely that the founding countries were “[r]esolved to substitute for age-old rivalries the merging of their essential interests; to create, by establishing an economic community, the basis for a broader and deeper community among peoples long divided by bloody conflicts; and to lay the foundations for institutions which will give direction to a destiny henceforward shared.”²⁰ While national interests have interfered at times, these institutions have been based on the idea of equality among members for the peace and prosperity of Europe.

The Pillars of Language Policy

Perhaps the greatest sign of this desire for equality is the EU's language policy. To the surprise of many, the first EU predecessor started with only one language—French. After all, the ECSC was essentially a French idea which was then shared by the other five countries. French was also a major language of Europe and the world at that time, as well as the official national language or one of the official languages of three of the original six member-states—Belgium, France, and Luxembourg. The ECSC's treaty was “drawn up in a *single original*, [and was to be]

²⁰ “Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community,” signed 18 April 1951, from preamble. From *Treaties establishing the European Communities* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1973), 15.

deposited in the archives of the Government of the French Republic.”²¹ The nations’ leaders signed the treaty on 18 April 1951, the document itself showing special symbolism. While only in one language, the unity that each member desired was visible. As the *Times* (London) reported, “The document embodying the treaty will be symbolic of the fusion of sovereignty of the six countries. It will be printed on Louis XIV type, with German ink on Dutch vellum. It will be bound in Belgian and Luxembourg parchment, and adorned with a marker of Italian silk.”²²

Regardless of the elegant presentation of the treaty, Robert Schuman cautioned that nothing in the text of the treaty would be set in stone: “We shall have to think about the technical details that will be the subject of conventions to be concluded later, but without writing them into the Treaty now. We shall work as a team, and not as a negotiating conference with rigid, pedantic rules.”²³ The amount of official languages was one of the areas in which this was applied. This must have been a volatile subject—France, while proclaiming that she did not want to dominate the ECSC, presented the treaty solely in her language. To resolve this discrepancy and make an official stance, the countries’ leaders decided that the High Authority would oversee a committee that would figure out the language policy.²⁴

The following year the ECSC created an official language policy based on the equality of the countries involved and of their national languages. In July 1952, when the treaty was scheduled to come into effect, the leaders of the six countries met again to discuss final issues

²¹ “Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community,” Article 100, signed 18 April 1951. Emphasis mine. From *Treaties establishing the European Communities* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1973), 100. While I had read this article before, I did not notice the language reference until I read it in Normand Labrie, *La construction linguistique de la Communauté européenne*, (Paris: Honoré Champion Edituer, 1993), 60. This book, while not quoted at any point, was extremely helpful in finding other information. Even before I read Labrie’s comments, I read in Henry J. Merry’s “The European Coal and Steel Community. Operations of the High Authority,” *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 2 (June 1955), 166. His article (footnote 1) mentions how the treaty was only written in one language.

²² “Schuman Plan Treaty: Final Agreement Reached,” 18 April 1951, *Times* (London), 6.

²³ Monnet, *Memoirs*, 322.

²⁴ “Les décisions de la conférence,” 20 April 1951, *Le Monde* (Paris), 3.

and improvements. One of the issues that the leaders resolved was the language policy. They decided that the ECSC would have four official and working languages—Dutch, French, German, and Italian.²⁵ This is a vital decision for the future of the language policy of all European Communities. If one were to compare the growth of the language policy to a snowball rolling down a hill, this was the beginning of the roll.

This goes contrary to what some have argued. Language rights expert and author of *Law and Language in the European Union* Richard L. Creech argues that before the 1970s (the first enlargement with Denmark, Great Britain, and Ireland), no one seriously thought about the official language policy.²⁶ Jean-Pierre Puissechet argues that the issue did come up before the 1970s, but only in 1957. He argues that the EEC formed a language policy with four languages which reflected “the exigencies of political equality among the States. . . . [I]t was essential that the administration responsible for the implementation and the individuals to whom they apply be able to take cognizance of the text in their native tongues.”²⁷

²⁵ “Les «six» n’ont pu se mettre d’accord sur la si ge des institutions du plan Schuman,” 25 July 1952, *Le Monde* (Paris), 2. This piece of information was extremely useful and shaped my argument about the timing of the policy more than anything else. I did not know about this until I read about it in a few separate works. First I read in Merry’s “The European Coal and Steel Community. Operations of the High Authority,” *The Western Political Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 2 (June 1955), 169. Here he says that ECSC meetings were conducted in two languages and documents were produced in all four. This helped me recognize that French was not the only official language. Then I read in “A history of the DGT,” from the European Commission (see bibliography), which assumed that the ECSC worked in four languages. Then in Labrie, *La construction linguistique de la Communaut  europ enne*, 71–73, I found multiple secondary sources that referred a meeting in 1952 when the leaders of the members decided upon four official languages. This prompted me to search the newspapers where I found this crucial piece of evidence.

²⁶ E-mail from Richard L. Creech to the author, 23 October 2006.

²⁷ Jean-Pierre Puissechet, *The Enlargement of the European Communities: A Commentary on the Treaty and Acts Concerning the Accession of Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom* (Leyden, The Netherlands: A. W. Sijthoff International Publishing Company, 1975), 40, from Richard L. Creech, *Law and Language in the European Union: The Paradox of a Babel “United in Diversity,”* 14. Creech quoted page 58 of the French version (see bibliography) of this book and translated the quote himself. The quote in my text is directly from the English version of the book. Creech quoted this because this refers to the motives of Regulation 1 of 1958 on official languages (see below) and how that was motivated by political equality and for each individual to read official documents in his or her own language. This started me on the idea of equality and thus deserves some of the credit for the formation of my argument. It did not help, however, to determine the motives of the language policy before 1958, specifically of the original ECSC language policy, which forms an integral part of my argument.

Puissochet accurately describes the motive of the language policy correct. While his timing is better than Creech's, it is still a bit off. While 1957 and the 1970s produced important turning points in the official language policy, this 1952 ECSC decision is more important. Without this first decision, French may have remained the official language of the ECSC and subsequently the EEC and EC. A French-dominated language policy could have been a serious blow to an organization that promoted equality, but which was plagued many times with the promotion of national interests or with larger countries overpowering smaller ones. Perhaps the biggest problem that the ECSC faced in its creation and early implementation was that each country wanted to promote unity, but had its own ideas at times concerning how the organization should be run. All of the disagreements were resolved, but not without delays and contention.

An example of this is an argument that occurred when the ECSC was first created. The disagreement was over the location of the capital of the ECSC. Some argued that it should exemplify unity and thus be located in Saarbrücken (German city bordering France which has been in the middle of multiple conflicts between France and Germany). A tentative decision was reached, saying that if France and Germany could overcome their disagreements, it would become the seat. The disagreement between France and Germany rooted in the fact that each country saw the other as trying to impose its will on the issue. Chancellor Adenauer was particularly upset as France supported efforts to land the seat in Strasbourg (a city in the same region as Saarbrücken, but in France).²⁸ Then smaller countries felt as if France and Germany were the only decision makers, without regard to the other countries' opinions. About Belgium and the Netherlands, the *Times* reported that "A certain feeling of bitterness seems, however, to

²⁸ "Les «six» n'ont pu se mettre d'accord sur la siège des institutions du plan Schuman," 25 July 1952, *Le Monde* (Paris), 2.

be prevalent among the smaller countries in the pool; they feel, as they have frequently done in the past, that a decision has been reached by an agreement of the greater Powers.”²⁹

As *Le Monde* effectively pointed out, one could reasonably expect that each nation—faced with a loss of autonomy to the ECSC—would want to promote its own interests.³⁰ Disagreements similar to that over the location of the ECSC seat show this struggle that the ECSC had to overcome in its early years. The sole use of French as an official language would have come across in the same light. If French were made the only language, debates surely would have ensued. Frenchmen, as well as Francophone Belgians and Luxembourgers, would have been fine with the decision. Yet those who did not speak French natively would have been upset. If the ECSC had survived the surefire disagreement over a French-dominated language policy making French *the* official language, it would have been improbable for other languages in the future to even be considered for official language status.

Thus 1952 produced the main turning point in the EU language policy and thus should be seen as the main catalyst of the EU’s current language situation. The official language number quadrupled, creating the first increase in the number of languages. It was the decisive moment between choosing to keep one official language or allowing the number to grow. It started a trend based on dialogue and equality, all in the efforts to create a community where people could communicate in their native tongue.

This trend continued as the Treaty of Rome in 1957, creating the European Economic Community (EEC), followed the lead of the ECSC and made Dutch, French, German, and Italian the four official languages of the community. This time, however, the actual treaty makes references to these official languages and which body of the EEC would decide the official

²⁹ “Seat of Coal and Steel Pool,” *Times* (London), 25 July 1952, 6.

³⁰ “La conférence sur le plan Schuman n’a pas encore abouti,” *Le Monde* (Paris), 17 April 1951, 3.

languages and says that the treaty in any of the four languages has equal validity. Article 248 mentions that the treaty was “drawn up in a single original in the Dutch, French, German and Italian languages, all four texts being equally authentic.”³¹ Furthermore, Article 217 determines that the Council of the EEC—one of the bodies created to govern the EEC—would come to unanimous decisions to determine the future of the language policy. The Council put this power to use in 1958 when it produced Regulation 1 on official languages in the EEC. This decision upheld the Treaty of Rome’s placement of four languages into the official language group. This is also where the law was first put in print that a citizen could write to the EEC in his or her native language (if an official language) and receive a response in that same language.³²

Expectations of Equality

While the treaty language shows that the goal of the language policy was to have equal official languages, attempts (and failures in many cases) to implement this policy show even more about the motivation of the language policy. Letters from members of the European Parliament to other governing bodies and responses from these bodies during the 1960s (the period directly after the formation of the ECSC and EEC) show that the expectations of European politicians were that all languages were to receive equal treatment. They expected that the implementation of this through translation of official documents and interpretation of official meetings would testify to this equality. These hopes support the notion that equality motivated the language policy of the early European Communities.

³¹ “Treaty establishing the European Economic Community,” Article 248, signed 25 March 1957. From *Treaties establishing the European Communities* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1973), 343.

³² “Regulation 1 determining the languages to be used by the European Economic Community,” by the Council of the European Economic Community in 1958, Articles 1, 2, and 4, found at [http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/pri/en/oj/dat/2004/l_169/l_16920040501en00010002.pdf]. This copy is from 2004, but the original had the same wording except that Article 1 only included Dutch, French, German, and Italian. First found mention of this in Creech, *Law and Language in the European Union*, 13.

A variety of questions from members of the European Parliament (EP) began in the 1960s when many of these saw injustices in the implementation of what many call the “principle of equality” in the official language policy. The first official questions appeared on 12 December 1960, when G. M. Nederhorst (from the Netherlands) wrote to both the ECSC (which still existed under the umbrella of the EEC) and the European Commission, another governing body of the EEC. Nederhorst asked the ECSC why it had translated a document on substances in coal depositories only into French and German. The reason given beforehand was that the document’s purpose did not reach beyond the speakers of these two languages. Nederhorst refuted this and requested that the High Authority of the ECSC translate the document into Dutch and Italian.³³ To this, the High Authority responded on 11 January 1961, that it was “fully aware of the need to observe strict equality in the use of the four official languages.”³⁴ The document continues to explain that the High Authority followed this principle in official documents, yet since the document to which Nederhorst referred to was not an official ECSC document, the ECSC did not translate it. However, the ECSC promised to produce Dutch and Italian copies in the near future.

Two similar cases involved questions from W. F. Lichtenauer (from the Netherlands) on 5 May and 26 June 1961.³⁵ The concerns were similar to that of Nederhorst, being that certain documents were not translated into all the languages of the EEC. The 5 June 1961 reply from the High Authority was also similar, saying that while the ECSC produced and used the document, it

³³ Assemblée Parlementaire Européenne, question écrite N° 88 de M. Nederhost à la Haute Autorité de la Communauté Européenne du Charbon et de l’Acier, (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 12 December 1960. According to a Web site that includes a biography of Nederhost (<http://www.parlement.com/9291000/biof/00959>), he was Dutch (deceased in 1979).

³⁴ Communauté Européenne du Charbon et de l’acier, Haute Autorité, réponse à la question posée par Monsieur G. M. Nederhost (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 11 January 1961.

³⁵ Assemblée Parlementaire Européenne, question écrite N° 23 de M. Lichtenauer à la Haute Autorité de la Communauté européenne du charbon et de l’acier (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 5 May 1961 and Assemblée Parlementaire Européenne, question écrite N° 33 de M. Lichtenauer à la Haute Autorité de la Communauté européenne du charbon et de l’acier (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 26 June 1961. According to a Web site that includes a biography of Lichtenauer (“Dr. W.F. Lichtenauer” from <http://www.parlement.com/9291000/biof/00811>), he was Dutch (deceased in 1987).

was not an official publication and therefore not translated into the four languages.³⁶ In the 21 July 1961 reply to the second letter, the High Authority—obviously annoyed—told Lichtenauer that “The High Authority sees it necessary to emphasize one more time that the note mentioned by the Honorable Parliamentarian is not a publication and was not conceived as such.”³⁷

On the same day as his first letter, Nederhorst wrote a note to the European Commission. His complaint here was that during a visit of a member of the Commission, there was no Dutch interpreter and that the working documents were produced in all languages except Dutch. Nederhorst finished his letter begging the question, “Can the Commission take measures to ensure that the principle of equality of the four official languages of the Community is ensured in the future?”³⁸ To these complaints, the Commission humorously replied at a later but unknown date that the Dutch interpreter had arrived fifteen minutes late. Also, the Dutch documents were present, but were not distributed until after the other languages’ documents. The Commission said that it was still trying to resolve this issue. In closing, the Commission replied that “The Commission can assure the Honorable Parliamentarian that it ensures and will continue to ensure that the principle of equality of the four official languages be respected.”³⁹

While these questions and answers resulted from misunderstandings and mistakes, they each emphasize the same common point: parliamentarians expected obedience to the principle of equality of the four official languages inasmuch as they are used to produce official translations and interpretations. This upholds the idea that equality motivated the original language policy and the implementation of it throughout the following years. Other documents show different

³⁶ Communauté Européenne du Charbon et de l’Acier, Haute Autorité, réponse de la Haute Autorité à la question écrite N° 23 de Monsieur W.F. Lichtenauer (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 5 June 1961.

³⁷ Communauté Européenne du Charbon et de l’Acier, Haute Autorité, réponse de la Haute Autorité à la question écrite N° 33 de Monsieur W.F. Lichtenauer (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 21 July 1961.

³⁸ Assemblée Parlementaire Européenne, question écrite N° 89 de M. Nederhost à la Commission de la Communauté Economique Européenne (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 12 December 1960.

³⁹ La Commission de la Communauté Economique Européenne, réponse à la question écrite N° 89 de Monsieur Nederhost (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), no date given.

challenges that the principle of equality faced. Regardless of the challenge, the principle of equality was always involved in the problem and solution.

On 15 January 1962, H. Vredeling (from the Netherlands) submitted a question to the Commission bringing up an interesting issue. Vredeling asked whether documents concerning issues with specific member-states that were produced in only the languages of those member-states were in violation of the principle of equality.⁴⁰ The Commission responded that Regulation 1 of the Council in 1958 stated that correspondence between a member-state and the EEC would be conducted in the language of the member-state and that such communication was not a violation of the principle of equality.⁴¹

An interesting problem also came up in reference to the use of foreign words in the texts of documents of other languages. Such was the case with a French term that appeared in a Dutch translation. The French phrase was *tel quel* and appeared as an odd scar on the face of a Dutch document as follows: “De hoeveelheid ‘tel quel’ van de in lid 1 bedoelde ruwe suiker.”⁴² Presenting this statement as evidence as to the appearance of a French phrase in a document translated into his native Dutch, Vredeling sarcastically asked on 13 June 1969, “Should one deduce that the French language has become an integral part of the Dutch language?”⁴³ This was a serious threat to the purity of the Dutch translation and thus offended the Dutch speakers of the EEC. To this question, the Commission replied that the French term was a more common term in

⁴⁰ Assemblée Parlementaire Européenne, question écrite N° 75 de M. Vredeling à la Commission de la Communauté économique européenne (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 15 January 1962. According to a *Times* (London) article (“Common Market Ministers Fail to Make Progress,” 15 November 1963, page 12) and a Web site that includes a biography (“Ir. H. Vredeling” from <http://www.parlement.com/9291000/biof/01485>), Vredeling is Dutch (still alive according to the latter source).

⁴¹ La Commission de la Communauté Economique Européenne, réponse à la question écrite N° 75 de M. Vredeling. (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), no date given.

⁴² *Tel quel* means in English “as it is.” This Dutch phrase, with the French phrase included, refers to amounts of raw sugar. Brooke Cheesman, a proficient Dutch reader, found it difficult to coherently translate the sentence without having the original document in which the extract appeared.

⁴³ Assemblée Parlementaire Européenne, question écrite n° 150/69 de M. Vredeling à la Commission des Communautés Européennes (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 13 June 1969.

the relevant industry than the Dutch equivalent, making it perfectly acceptable.⁴⁴ Whether this was a poor cover up for a translation error, an actual desire to make French a part of the Dutch language, or truly the use of a foreign but more common phrase, the Dutch reaction shows the expectation that each language was to receive equal respect and attention.

Another serious problem, which encompasses the main points of most of these complaints, is that the EEC did not provide translations or interpretations in certain languages at times even though a crowd would have benefited from them. On 4 May 1966, Vredeling pointed this out as he asked about consultative meetings for which translations were not provided in all the languages. In seeking an explanation, Vredeling also asked if the Commission could ensure the quality of the EEC's translations.⁴⁵ The Commission responded, explaining that because of the low number of qualified Italian and Dutch interpreters, certain meetings where they saw no immediate need for these interpretations continued without using these languages.⁴⁶

Many of these complaints rooted from misunderstandings such as these. Interpreters were late, countries did not know the difference between official or unofficial documents, and so forth. But many questions rooted from real concerns of certain languages receiving more attention than others. This created a contradiction between the motivation of the policy and the implementation of it and is a problem that the EU and its predecessors have had to face. Yet just because the implementation of the policy has not always been in line with equality does not mean that the policy was not motivated by equality. In a community where communication is based on translation and interpretation, one cannot realistically expect every language to receive perfect

⁴⁴ La Commission des Communautés Européennes, réponse à la question écrite n° 150/69 de M. VREDELING (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), no date given.

⁴⁵ Assemblée Parlementaire Européenne, question écrite N° 31 de M. Vredeling à la Commission de la Communauté économique européenne (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), 4 May 1966.

⁴⁶ La Commission de la Communauté Economique Européenne, réponse à la question écrite N° 31 posée par M. Vredeling (Brussels: Archives of the European Parliament), no date given.

attention in every meeting and document. It is probably true that many more similar cases of injustice were ignored or not recorded, but it is also probably true that no one heard about the hundreds of meetings and documents that were translated and interpreted with all four languages receiving equal attention. It is unlikely that those successes reached the press or a parliamentarian's notebook.

However, shortcomings did exist and the fact that politicians chose to highlight these indicate what their expectations were of the language policy. This demonstrates that equality was the standard and motivation on which the policy was based and on which the policy was supposed to survive. While numerous explanations can be thought up explain why the language policy was formed as it was, the explanation most supported by the motives of the founding fathers, the ideals upon which European unity was based, and the concerns of politicians on language rights is that equality motivated and sustained the language policy of the ECSC, EEC, and subsequent forms of European unity.

Language Policy in the *Langue Run*

Since this ideal of equality was what the original language policy was based on, it follows that a similar language policy would continue to exist with this motive as more members joined the European Communities in the following years. This is all a result of the original decision in 1952 to expand the official language group to four languages. It was only logical that the languages of those that joined would be made official just as were those of the original six members. The first occurrence of this was when the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Ireland joined the EC in 1973. After debate and deliberation, English and Danish were admitted as official EC languages, increasing the total number of languages to six. The main debates regarding these additions dealt with two fears. One was that that English was spoken by too

many and would dominate the language scene.⁴⁷ The other was that the “obscurity of Danish” would become an annoyance for communication.⁴⁸ Regardless of these fears, these languages were included as equal partners with the other four languages in the group.

This continued with further enlargements. In 1981, Greece joined the EC, bringing Greek with it as the EC’s seventh official language. Spain and Portugal brought their languages to the group in 1986 when those countries joined the EC, making the number nine. Nine years later—in 1995—Austria, Finland, and Sweden made up the first enlargement of the new EU, making Finish and Swedish the tenth and eleventh languages of the EU.⁴⁹ These additions showed equality of both new and old members and reflected the language policy of the ECSC and EEC.

A huge wave of expansion hit in 2004, when Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia joined the EU. With these countries came a mouthful of languages, specifically Czech, Estonian, Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Slovenian, and Slovakian, bringing the tally up to twenty official languages.⁵⁰ On 1 January 2007, Irish will become the twenty-first language of the EU.⁵¹ Following it on the same day came Romanian and Bulgarian as their speakers’ countries became EU members. This brings the number to twenty-three and there is no sign of stopping. With Turkey, Croatia, and others seeking entry into the EU, the EU language number will continue to grow as new members join. Because of the basic principle of equality of all member-state

⁴⁷ Puissechet, *The Enlargement of the European Communities*, 40–41.

⁴⁸ E-mail from Richard L. Creech to the author, 23 October 2006.

⁴⁹ German, Austria’s language, had already been an official language since 1952 (ECSC) and 1957 (EEC).

⁵⁰ Since Greek is Cyprus’ official language, Cyprus was the only country of the 2004 enlargement to not bring with it a new official language.

⁵¹ Irish was not made an official language in 1973 but has since been approved due to lobbying by the Irish. According to Máiréad Nic Craith, Ireland did not want to promote Irish as an official language in Ireland’s accession talks because English is spoken by most Irishmen and using Irish would create excessive translation responsibilities. From Nic Craith, *Europe and the Politics of Language: Citizens, Migrants and Outsiders* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 41. However, since then, Ireland has lobbied for its addition into the official language group and has succeeded.

languages upon which the policy stands, it appears that the number will never decrease, but continue to increase with each enlargement.⁵²

While the motives of the European Communities and the expectations of European politicians show that the desire for equality gave birth to this language policy, there are other arguments that one could use to explain this. One could say that this number of official languages comes from clumsy planning on the part of the ECSC and EEC architects. While the leaders did foresee the union reaching out to other countries that spoke many languages, perhaps they did not think about the language issue. Then, by the time they realized it could be a troublesome issue, it was too late to change it. One could also argue that the current amount of languages is the result of political compromise. Because of a new delicate economic union between former enemies, none of the leaders wanted to discriminate any other member's language. Besides, the nations must have learned from the post-World War I period, when a severely-weakened Germany produced fertile ground for extreme nationalism under Adolf Hitler and thus generated another world war. By not wanting to bring about similar consequences after World War II, languages—as an essential part of each nation's identity—must have been promoted and given equal status based on political compromise.

While these arguments seem convincing, they are incomplete. A better explanation of the EU's current language policy stems from the more correct parts of both of these inferior arguments in conjunction with the idea that the original leaders of the ECSC made conscious decisions to preserve linguistic equality in an economic union based on equality. It is true that early leaders foresaw a united Europe reaching far beyond the original six member countries. It is also true that France learned a great deal about relations with Germany from the periods

⁵² It could also be the case, as with Irish, that a member-state lobbies a certain language for official status. Spain, for example, could push for many of its regional languages to become official and thus make the language number grow without expanding the EU's borders.

following World Wars I and II. Yet the language policy that the ECSC and successors formed has not been a result of clumsiness, ignorance, or compromise. Instead, it is a result of the same ideal that has motivated and sustained Europe over the past fifty-five years. An organization built on equality to end nationalistic competition could not make one language officially more important than the others. Thus its language policy has been the result of conscious decisions to promote equal relationships between members and their languages. The motives of the founding fathers and the expectations of equality from members of the European Parliament show that equality motivated both the creation of a community and fair language policy.

Those who continue to make mention of “Eurobabble” and a continent “lost in translation” would benefit from a better understanding of the trade-off that has occurred in the EU and its predecessors over the past fifty-five years. On one hand, the ECSC, EEC, EC, or EU all have had the ability to promote economic, political, and communicational efficiency by choosing one or two languages to work with. Yet at the expense of this would be the equality of member-states’ languages and the ideological foundation of a community. The European Communities have chosen not to follow this route, hoping that a union built on equality can provide such to its citizens in many ways, in particular by respecting the languages they speak. This choice does often bring EU legal processes near a standstill and make Europe a little *langue* winded. Yet more importantly than the side effects, this choice has helped fulfill the desire shared by Schuman, Monnet, Adenauer, and others—that equality can blossom between Europe’s former enemies, among its peoples, and with its language policy.

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