



Thursday June 15th, 2017.

Dear Mr Alun Davies, Minister for Lifelong Learning and the Welsh Language,

Re. Inter-Governmental Working Group on the Brexit Effect on the Celtic languages.

On behalf of the European Language Equality Network, which works to represent the 55 million speakers of European regional or minority languages and with member organisations in Wales, Ireland, Scotland and Cornwall, I am writing to you to express our concerns about the potentially disastrous effect of Brexit on the Celtic languages.

On May 30th the Cross Party Group for Gaelic in the Scottish Parliament discussed the issue. At the meeting we called for a special inter-governmental working group to be set up immediately to deal with, and to provide solutions for, the negative effect of Brexit on Celtic language speaking communities. It would comprise the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government, the Irish Government, the Executive in the north of Ireland, Cornwall Council, ELEN and language NGOs.

The EU, the UK, and the autonomous governments have been strong supporters of regional or minority languages, linguistic diversity and our shared cultural heritage. It is vital that these institutions continue to act to support the Celtic languages, most of which are defined as endangered and need support for their revitalisation, and to ensure that this sector is represented during the forthcoming Brexit negotiations.

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 and Horizon 2020, but, more importantly, indirect funding from structural funds such as the Social Fund, Regional Development Fund, Interreg, Growth, LEADER and EAFRD, all of which have created sustainable employment for Celtic language speakers in sectors such as agriculture, fishing, construction, engineering, tourism, and higher and further education.

The UK Government has said that existing funding will be guaranteed only for another 2.5 years until 2020. In addition, with a hard Brexit, or no deal at all, there will be the huge loss of access to the European markets with the potential of trade tariffs and border controls which will affect all economic sectors. In the Brexit negotiations it will be vital for our governments to make the case for the economic well-being of our language 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.

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

Similarly, the areas of Scotland with high levels of Gaelic speakers will be affected. Many are crofters and fishermen who will be affected by the trade barriers; others work in construction and many more in tourism which are also supported through European funding.

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.

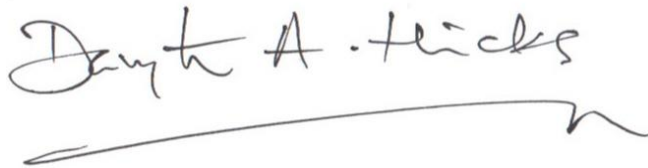
It is a situation that we find unacceptable, and coming at a time where we are doing crucial work to revitalize Irish, Welsh, Gaelic and Cornish.

To conclude, we call upon the Welsh Government to support our initiative to swiftly set up an intergovernmental working group to address the impact of Brexit on the Celtic languages. This could be done as a stand-alone working group that meets on an *ad hoc* basis in order to formulate a joint response and action from governments and NGOs as the Brexit negotiations get under way. Or, it could be set up under the auspices of the Indigenous and Minority Language Group of the British-Irish Council.

Furthermore, given that Welsh will be the language most adversely affected by Brexit we suggest that the Welsh Government consider leading on this initiative.

Should you wish to discuss these issues further please feel free to contact me at the address below.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Davyth A. Hicks". The signature is written in a cursive style and is followed by a long horizontal flourish line.

Dr. Davyth Hicks
ELEN Secretary-General
European Language Equality Network (ELEN) Representation to the EU
Brussels, Belgium.
Tel. 00 32 473 683 290
davyth.hicks@eurolang.net

ELEN Head Office
6 plasenn Gwirioù Mab-Den, Ti ar Vro,
29270 Karaez / Carhaix, Breizh.
Pg/tel/fax : 00 33 (0)2 98 73 20 58
elen.secretariat@elen.ngo
www.elen.ngo

ELEN represents 44 lesser-used languages with 150 member organisations in 22 European states and has consultative status with the European Parliament, the Council of Europe, the UN and UNESCO.