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# VIADUCT Student Paper

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Enhancing Visibility of the Academic Dialogue on EU-Turkey Cooperation

## TURKISH LANGUAGE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION POST-BREXIT

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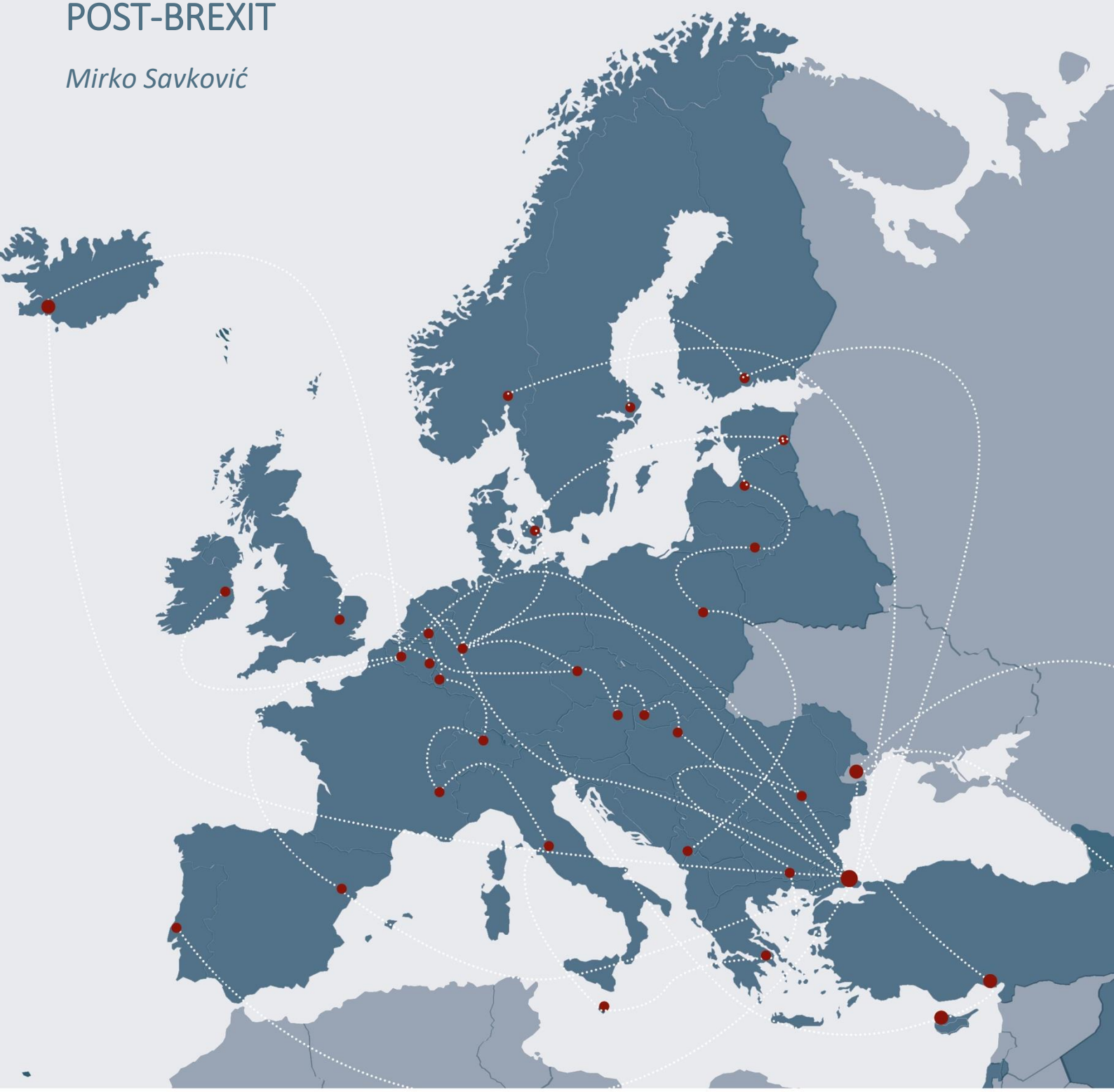

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## Introduction

Linguistic diversity is one of the prominent characteristics of European society, and one which is celebrated in *'In Varietate Concordia'* (English: *United in Diversity*), the motto of the continental union. In total, twenty-four official languages are used in the corridors of Brussels' institutions (Baaij, p 1, 2018), while an even larger number of others are used throughout the continent.

Three out of twenty-four official EU languages are dominant and enjoy the so-called *procedural languages* status. These are English, French, and German (Europa.eu, 2013).

Turkish is not one of the official languages of the European Union despite its formal co-official status on the island of Cyprus. In this respect, Turkish (euractiv.com, 2018) is one of only two languages which are official in an EU member state, but not at the level of the Union, the other being Luxembourgish (Morgan, 2016a). In this paper, I will examine three different proposals for changes to the European post-Brexit linguistic policy, and how these models may affect Turkish language in Europe.

Furthermore, I argue that linguistic policy towards the Turkish language may be of wider importance to relations between Turkey and the European Union, as well as in the process of integration of Turkish communities within the EU.

## Context

The decision of the UK electorate to leave the EU has led to some speculations over the future status of the English language in the EU. It has also brought to light certain inadequacies in the European language policy, which may prove to be less inclusive than the previously mentioned grand principles may lead us to believe. I am of the opinion that Brexit has the potential to create momentum toward revisiting and changing the EU's language policy internally. In order to ensure the smooth operations of formal regulations in the daily activities of the organization's bodies, the European Union will be forced to adapt its linguistic policies to new realities. If this is not done, there will be a gap between the real world and the European regulations. In order for the adaptation process to be successful, the EU will be forced to implement deeper reforms which may include revisiting policies towards the official usage of the Turkish language.

The Turkish language is present in various capacities and regions of Europe, as a traditional, local, and relatively new language. The Turkish language is one of the two official languages on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, which has been a member state of the EU since the 2004 Enlargement. Turkish is recognized minority language in Greece (O'Rourke, 2002), Romania (Chelaru-Murăruș, 2017), and a couple of Western Balkans EU candidate states. It is the native tongue of Turk communities in Bulgaria, which does not provide similar adequate protection for traditional minority languages (Lazarova and Rainov, 2009). In addition to its traditional presence in post-Ottoman Southeast Europe, the Turkish language is the native tongue for numerous *Gastarbeiter* communities in Western Europe. Despite its various official, recognized and unrecognized, minority, and immigrant statuses, the language does not enjoy official status at the European Union level.

This situation is the result of the fact that no single EU member state has ever identified or classified it as such. Each EU member state is entitled to identify only one official language at the level of the EU (Morgan, 2016b). This has left large linguistic communities unrepresented within the institutions. Some of the more prominent minority languages which are not enjoying official status are: Basque, Romani, Rusyn, Russian, Catalan, Welsh, and Hebrew, as well as languages of new diaspora communities. As a consequence, some EU citizens do not have access to services in their own native tongue. To be fair, many of them are bilingual or multilingual, but linguistic diversity is a recognized value in multicultural Europe. Yet, the European Union is relying exclusively on its member states' willingness to nominate and promote the usage of certain languages. In the post-Brexit situation, where there will be not a single member state nominating English as its preferred language, the EU may need to reconsider its language policy. There are different approaches as to how this may be done.

Some may claim that by nominating one official language per state, 27 of the largest languages will be used in official communication. Yet, this assumption is not entirely correct. Some of the EU member states are relatively small countries with small populations and even smaller national languages. For example, the Catalan linguistic community is larger in number than communities of speakers of Irish, Maltese, Estonian, Latvian, Slovene, Lithuanian, Slovak, Finnish, and Danish which are all, contrary to Catalan, enjoying official status within the EU institutions (Marian, n.d.). There are also large Arabic, Russian, and Turkish speaking communities which are larger than communities speaking some of the official languages. Arguably, this approach is creating situation of unequal treatment of citizens caused by the preferences of national governments which are not always necessarily willing to implement the most inclusive policies. Ginsburgh, Ortuño-Ortín, and Weber argue that situations in which individuals in linguistically diversified societies are denied the full access to documents and political process in their native tongues leads to language disenfranchisement (Ginsburgh, Ortuño-Ortín, Weber, 2005).

In some other domains, such as the rule of law, the European Union is providing citizens with access to justice through legal mechanisms available at the European Court of Justice. A similar logic of direct engagement between citizens and European Union institutions may be implemented in the aftermath of Brexit in the case of language policy. It is hard to imagine a situation in which the English language will not be used by the EU after Brexit. The English language has in practice become the dominant European language in the post-Cold War context. The European Union may formally decide to keep English as its official language despite the fact that not a single member state except the United Kingdom nominated it as such. After all, English is an international language which cannot be ignored. Still, this decision will create a new legal situation in which European Union may use additional official languages which are not nominated by its member states. To ensure fairness, the European Union may need to consider the introduction of some of its minority languages and other global languages in its official use as well. Here we are turning to three models based on which a reform may be designed. Those models are; 1) Status Quo + Model, 2) Rainbow Linguistic Policy Model and 3) The Neighbouring UN Languages Model.

## Models

To begin with, the European Union may decide to automatically recognize all official languages of the EU member states as official languages of the union. This first model would strengthen the existing model, which is currently leaving some questions unanswered and as such may be described as the Status Quo + Model of

linguistic policy. This model preserves the official status of English (as it is an official language in both Ireland and Malta). In addition, it would make Turkish and Luxemburgish new official languages, increasing the total number to 26. This would enable large sections of the Turkish population not fluent in foreign languages to access materials in their native tongue. It may not have an impact on their attitudes towards Europe, but it certainly will make them better informed about the union. In this model, the Turkish language may be described as the primary benefactor of the linguistic reform as most of the citizens in Luxemburg are already multilingual and speak one or more of the official languages of the EU.

The second model is an ambitious one in which the European Union may decide to recognize all minority languages that are larger than the smallest official language proposed by a member state. This model is the most inclusive one and may be described as the Rainbow Linguistic Policy Model. This model will result in the introduction of Catalan, Basque, Romani and other minority languages, all of which are larger than Irish, into official use. This more radical model might not introduce all recognized minority languages into official use. Yet, it may significantly increase the number of official languages to a point in which it may become too much of a technical challenge for daily operations to run smoothly. This is the second model which may provide for the protection of the Turkish language, or some traditional Turkish dialects from the Balkans.

The last model is based on the principle of good neighbouring policy, in which the European Union may decide to introduce into official use large international languages from its neighbourhood. This model is based on the good neighbourhood principle and the official list of languages of the United Nations. As such, it may be described as the Neighbouring UN Languages Model. It may be a bit challenging to define 'big international languages' but if one is to follow the list of official languages of the United Nation those would be English, Russian and Arabic. This option may increase the number of official languages again to 26, but in this case, the Turkish language would still not enjoy official status. This may create dissatisfaction and additional bad faith between the two sides, which should be avoided at the time in which relations are already strained.

## Conclusion

The Turkish language is traditionally present on the European continent, especially in its southeast region. During the second half of twentieth century, increasing number of Turkish speakers settled all around the continent.

Turkish does not enjoy official status anywhere except on the island of Cyprus. This policy issue has so far failed to attract sufficient attention from policy makers, interested communities, and individuals. The Turkish language is not amongst the languages which enjoy official status at the European Union level despite the fact that there are more Turkish speakers in the EU than there are speakers of some other official languages.

The decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union will challenge the existing linguistic policy of the community and will require new answers and adaptations. Interested academic community members need to give their own contribution to this debate as it may be a unique opportunity to create positive change at the European level.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# ABOUT VIADUCT

The **historical complexity and volatility of EU-Turkey relations** are reflect-ed by **research and teaching** in this field. There are international research projects as well as many smaller and nationally funded studies and pro-jects dealing with Turkey, including its relationship with the EU. Linking these different projects, diffusing knowledge on the European Integration process and exploiting synergies between international players constitutes real added-value for European Integration studies.

To this end, VIADUCT builds a large network with **40 partner institutions** and one extended network partner from **36 countries. Represented in every EU member state, Turkey and the neighbourhood**, VIADUCT is ex-tending its outreach in research and teaching beyond the EU.

The Challenge faced by the VIADUCT Partners are the **EU Turkey relations as a moving target**. On the one hand Turkey is seen as a "key strategic partner for the EU", on the other hand several interconnected crises are profoundly affecting EU–Turkey relations. VIADUCT's objective is, hence, to **promote research, teaching and policy dialogue on EU-Turkey relations**.

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