

CATALAN AND THE ELEVEN OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Languages of the states; languages of the EU

In the European Union, the languages with official status are those which have been unanimously agreed upon by the Council of Europe. With respect to member states where several official languages exist, the use of the language must be determined according to the legislation of the state, at the request of the interested state.

At present, there are eleven official languages in the fifteen-strong EU: German (Germany, Austria and Belgium), English (the United Kingdom and Ireland), Spanish, Danish, Finnish, French (France and Belgium), Dutch (Netherlands and Belgium), Greek, Italian, Portuguese and Swedish (Sweden and Finland).

Official languages and working languages

All of these official languages are also working languages. As they are official languages, EU treaties and regulations are published in them. As they are working languages, all internal and procedural documents are published in them and official meetings must take place with simultaneous translation.

Two states of the EU share more than one official language throughout their territory: Ireland (English and Irish Gaelic) and Luxembourg (Luxembourgish, French and German). Neither has applied to the EU for the official status of their own language. There are two more states which share official languages in part of their territory which are already officially recognised in the EU because they are also languages from another state. This is the case of Belgium (French, Dutch and German) and Finland (Finnish and Swedish). Spain, which has four official languages, only applied for Castilian to be given official status in the EU.

Despite this, in the European Union office in Barcelona, Catalan can be used as a contact language with European institutions in accordance with the Resolution of the European Parliament, dated 11th December 1990.

Catalan is the seventh most important language in the European Union

In comparison with the eleven official languages of the European Union, the territories in the Union where Catalan has official status (Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and the Community of Valencia) have more inhabitants than the territories in which five of the mentioned languages have official status (see table 3).

Table 3. Catalan and the eleven official languages of the European Union

LANGUAGE	INHABITANTS
German	90,2 M
French	62,7 M
English	62,2 M
Italian	57,4 M
Spanish	39,8 M
Dutch	21,2 M
Catalan	10,8 M
Greek	10,6 M
Portuguese	9,8 M
Swedish	9,3 M
Danish	5,2 M
Finnish	5,1 M

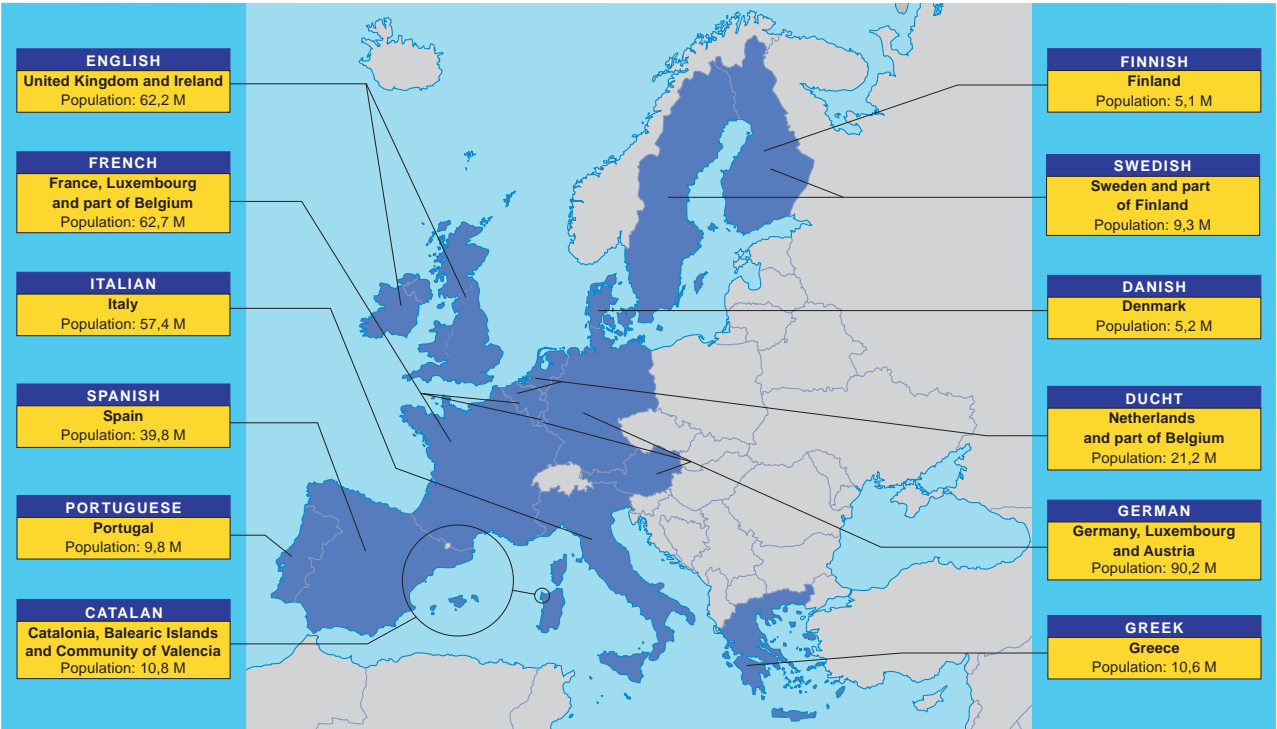
DATA SOURCE: IDESCAT. INE.
Panorama of the EU, 2000

If the number of people who really can speak the language is only taken into account, Catalan is more widely spoken than Danish and Finnish.

As far as economic power is concerned, it should be noted that the average GDP of EU member states is 21,000 EPA (1 EPA = 134.07 PTA). Twelve states have a higher GDP than the average and three have a lower one. The GDP of the Catalan speaking territories considered here (Catalonia, the Balearic Islands and the Community of Valencia) is higher than the GDP of Greece, Spain or Portugal.

In map 1 below, the following can be seen:

- the name of the official language and state or states where it is officially recognised.
- the population of the state or states where this language is officially recognised, expressed in millions of inhabitants (M)



Catalan is the 7th language in comparison with the official languages of the EU

SOURCES: Panorama of the EU, 2000. IDESCAT. INE.