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The place of mother tongue in school education

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1740 (2006)

Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has taken careful note of Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1740 \(2006\)](#) on the place of mother tongue in school education. It shares the Assembly's concerns about the preservation of the mother tongues of members of the different groups composing European society, since linguistic diversity is one of the features of cultural life in Europe and there can be no doubt that its value is incalculable.
2. In this field, the Committee of Ministers relies to a large extent on the work of the Steering Committee for Education (CDED), whose activities help to maintain and enhance linguistic and cultural diversity through co-operation with member states in the development of policies for the promotion of bilingual and multilingual education.
3. The CDED has carried out projects on bilingual education policies, which have led it to issue expert guidance for decision makers on devising linguistic policies and legislation on this subject. These projects have made it possible to foster exchanges and meetings between decision makers and professionals involved in bilingual education, as recommended by the Assembly in paragraph 12.2 of the recommendation.
4. With regard to the Assembly's proposal to "inventory the different models and types of bilingual education in Europe" (paragraph 12.1 of the recommendation), the Committee of Ministers refers to the CDED's study of the implications of bilingual education, which gives a classification of the main models of this form of teaching and thereby contributes to the objective set by the Assembly.
5. With regard to the Assembly's proposal in paragraph 12.3.2 of the recommendation that steps be taken to "foster development of children's plurilingual repertoires", the Committee of Ministers informs the Assembly that, further to the specific measures called for in its Recommendation No. R (98) 6 concerning modern languages, the CDED has devised practical tools for this purpose, including the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" and the "European Language Portfolio".
6. In addition to the study of the cultural and pedagogic factors that determine the place of mother tongues in school education, the Committee of Ministers has adopted a range of relevant legal instruments, including the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, to which the Assembly rightly refers. The charter, through its menu system, allows parties to adapt their instrument of ratification, to the way in which regional or minority languages are given a place in school education.
7. The Committee of Ministers regards this charter and the accompanying monitoring mechanism as a key instrument for promoting the place of the mother tongue in school education. Assessment of the charter's implementation by the states parties regularly gives rise to recommendations by the Committee of Ministers. A significant share of these recommendations relate to teaching in or of regional or minority languages, which are the mother tongues of most of their users, and to measures to promote bilingualism, which are largely consistent with the Assembly's considerations.

1. Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 16 January 2008, at the 1015th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.



8. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities also covers a number of issues raised by the Assembly in its recommendation. It commits states parties to promoting the conditions necessary for persons belonging to national minorities to maintain and develop their culture and to preserve the essential elements of their identity, namely their religion, language, traditions and historical heritage.

9. The Committee of Ministers also wishes to draw the Assembly's attention to the "Commentary on education under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities", adopted by the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention in March 2006, which summarises the experience of that committee at the first cycle of monitoring and emphasises some of the most crucial issues it has encountered in its work. This document points out that, in view of the many aims of education and the multitude of situations, there are no "one size fits all" solutions in the educational field. It also stresses, as does the Assembly, that permanent consultation with the persons and groups concerned is essential for the development of effective language education programmes.

10. Article 14 of the Framework Convention enshrines an undertaking by the parties to recognise that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to learn his or her minority language and endeavour to ensure, where certain conditions are fulfilled, as far as possible and within the framework of their education systems, that such persons have adequate opportunities to be taught the minority language or to receive instruction in it. This constitutes recognition of one of the main means whereby such persons can assert and preserve their identity. In this connection the Committee of Ministers wishes to draw the Assembly's attention to the report on the Seminar on International Legal Guarantees for the Protection of National Minorities and Problems of their Implementation with a Special Focus on Minority Education, held in Strasbourg on 18 October 2006.²

11. The Committee of Ministers notes that the Assembly's recommendation goes beyond the protection of minority languages *per se* and covers mother tongue education in general. The state parties' interpretation of the scope of application of the Framework Convention and of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages excludes a number of groups and/or languages of relevance to the recommendation. The Committee of Ministers would, however, draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that the use of the term "mother tongue" may be problematic in certain contexts, such as in bilingual families and amongst minorities using a third language that is neither the official language nor the traditional language of the said minority.

12. As regards paragraph 5 of the Assembly's recommendation, the Committee of Ministers considers that the principle that every young European has the duty to learn an official language of the country of which he or she is a resident citizen is an important factor of social cohesion and integration. Consequently, the primary objective of language policy in relation to migrant children should be to ensure their integration into the school system and school life of the receiving country as rapidly and effectively as possible, in order to foster subsequent integration into society and working life. The CDED also initiated a project to support young learners to be more proficient in school education language(s); an essential condition for success in their studies, for integration and social cohesion. Language policy should also, as far as possible, aim at promoting the migrant child's links with his or her country of origin or that of the parents. This is the thrust of Recommendation No. R (84) 7 of the Committee of Ministers on the maintenance of migrants' cultural links with their countries of origin and leisure facilities. This approach is taken up by Article 19.12 of the revised European Social Charter which reads: "[Parties undertake] to promote and facilitate, as far as practicable, the teaching of the migrant worker's mother tongue to the children of the migrant worker."

13. This approach has been taken into account in the work carried out by the European Committee on Migration (CDMG) when drawing up the draft recommendation on the integration of migrant children. This text has been finalised and will be considered by the Committee of Ministers shortly. It advocates measures by member states for assisting children in acquiring the required proficiency in the language of instruction whilst promoting, as far as practicable, the acquisition and maintenance of their native language.

14. The Committee of Ministers wishes to recall the priorities set by the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, in May 2005, in matters of social cohesion, education and culture as well as the guidelines of the Faro Strategy and consequently encourages member states which have not yet done so to consider signing or ratifying the relevant instruments adopted by the Council of Europe and UNESCO.

2. See: <http://wcd.coe.int>.