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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Strengthening measures to protect and revive highly endangered languages

Motion for a recommendation[1]
tabled by Ms Sinikka HURSKAINEN and other members of the Assembly

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

Among the fundamental aims of the Council of Europe are the protection and promotion of the wealth and diversity of Europe's cultural heritage. Regional or minority languages are very much part of this heritage. Since 1992, the Council of Europe's member states have been able to confirm their commitment to the protection of this heritage by ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

The monitoring process shows that the charter system has significantly improved the situation of regional or minority languages in almost all state parties. Unfortunately, the status of languages classified as highly endangered has not changed substantially over the past few years.

There are at least 37 highly endangered languages in the Council of Europe member states. To give an example of their prevalence in Europe, I will refer to some of them: Breton in France, Karelian in Finland, Crimean Tatar in Bulgaria, Eastern and Northern Frisian in Germany, Irish Gaelic in Ireland and the United Kingdom, Kashubian in Poland, Leonese in Spain and Portugal, Pontic Greek in Greece and Turkey, and Votian in the Russian Federation.

Strengthened measures to protect and revive these languages are now required. Without public support and recognition of their cultural value, many highly endangered languages will vanish before this century is over, because of their unsustainably small and declining speaker base. Each language death represents a significant loss of cultural heritage for human kind. Many of these language minorities have given irreplaceably precious cultural treasures to world culture, such as the Karelians who created the Kalevala folk poetry based on which the Finnish epic "Kalevala" was written.

The Assembly therefore calls on the Committee of Ministers to assess the need to complement the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages considering the specific features of highly endangered languages.

The Assembly proposes that the Committee of Ministers recommends that the governments of Council of Europe member states develop a specific action plan for strengthening the protection and revival of highly endangered languages. This plan should include the founding of a centre for co-ordinating the rescue work and other collaboration.

Signed (see overleaf)

1. Referred to the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, for report: Reference No. 3427 (see 11th Sitting, 14 April 2008).

Signed[2]*:*

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2. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
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