Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2196 (2018)[1]

The protection and promotion of regional or minority languages in Europe

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In European democracies, the use of regional or minority languages is a critical aspect of the personal and collective identity of all the European citizens concerned. Linguistic diversity is part of the common European cultural heritage; protection and support for the development of these languages is therefore a fundamental European value.

2. Once again, the Parliamentary Assembly confirms that the protection of the historical regional or minority languages of Europe, some of which are in danger of eventual extinction, contributes to the maintenance and development of Europe's cultural wealth and traditions. In this context, the Assembly draws attention to Recommendation 1201 (1993), Recommendation 1492 (2001), Resolution 1770 (2010) and Resolution 1985 (2014), all of which concern the rights of national minorities.

3. The Assembly notes that language is in itself a value and one of our cultural assets. It is therefore fundamentally important that the use of language ensure a community's cultural reproduction, that it enable individuals and the community to take part in political and cultural life, and in this way that it become integrated into economic and social processes.

4. These objectives are the goals of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148, "the charter"), which has played a unique role in protecting and supporting regional or minority languages over the last two decades. The Assembly appreciates the work which the committee of experts of the charter has carried out over the last two decades with this aim in mind.

5. The Assembly regrets that, to date, only 25 of the 47 member States have ratified the charter and 8 have signed it.

6. The Assembly is concerned about the fact that several States have still not submitted their reports on the application of the charter; some States have even failed to carry out an entire monitoring cycle, which hinders the work of the committee of experts and the Committee of Ministers on protecting and promoting regional or minority languages.

7. In the light of these considerations, the Assembly calls on the member States to:

7.1. sign and/or ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, if they have not already done so, and refrain from acts which would go against the principles laid out in the charter, irrespective of their status with regard to this instrument;

7.2. take the necessary steps to ensure that the right to use regional or minority languages is recognised in all aspects of the life of the community and, wherever possible, that those languages are raised to the status of second official language in the regions where such languages are traditionally used, bearing in mind the particular conditions and historical traditions specific to each region;

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1. *Assembly debate* on 23 January 2018 (3rd Sitting) (see Doc. 14466, report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Ms Rózsa Hoffmann). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 23 January 2018 (3rd Sitting).
See also Recommendation 2118 (2018).

7.3. submit their national report without further delay, in accordance with Article 15 of the charter, and participate constructively in the monitoring carried out by the committee of experts;

7.4. adapt the commitments relating to each language provided for in the charter to the socio-linguistic situation of the languages concerned, in conformity with the spirit of the charter;

7.5. apply a structured approach to fulfilling these commitments, involving all levels of institutions, including local and regional authorities, and provide a clear definition of responsibilities and implementing powers;

7.6. study and use States' best practices.

8. The Assembly invites the member States that are parties to the charter, pursuant to their commitments under the charter, to:

8.1. with regard to education:

8.1.1. comply with paragraphs10.4.2 to 10.4.5 of Resolution 1985 (2014);

8.1.2. determine, where possible before children begin school, what the child's mother tongue is and ensure that both the regional or minority language and the official language are taught using appropriate methods;

8.1.3. ensure that it is possible to study in the regional or minority language for the entire duration of schooling, from preschool, primary and secondary education through to vocational training and higher education, at least for pupils whose families so wish;

8.1.4. ensure that those who speak a regional or minority language as their mother tongue have the opportunity to learn the official language sufficiently, by incorporating good practice from the teaching of foreign and second languages into the methodological approach adopted for teaching the official language of the State;

8.1.5. ensure that people living in widely scattered settlements receive appropriate education in the language in question;

8.1.6. define preferential thresholds in the learning of regional or minority languages and apply them with the necessary flexibility in light of the interests of the community;

8.1.7. guarantee that young people speaking regional or minority languages can sit exams in appropriate conditions, offering them the same opportunities as the majority in the public and higher education system;

8.1.8. organise systems with suitable funding for training highly committed teachers, and apply specific incentives for pupils to opt for the regional or minority languages in question or for training courses provided in these languages;

8.1.9. endeavour in a proactive manner to produce textbooks that meet the requirements of the speakers of regional or minority languages, and – if that proves to be impossible – facilitate the use of textbooks from other countries published in those languages, in co-operation with educational regulation bodies of the countries where regional or minority languages are used;

8.1.10. ensure that education reforms do not affect teaching in regional or minority languages or the teaching of these languages in a disproportionately disadvantageous manner and that they fully respect the level of acquired rights;

8.1.11. allow communities which speak a regional or minority language to organise teaching in that language under their own authority and in their own institutional system, in the context of a given education system, as is already the case in several European countries;

8.2. with regard to the administrative authorities and public service organisations, allow the use of regional or minority languages, irrespective of the language threshold, in the areas where their speakers are traditionally present and where there is an interest in using them, in line with good practice in many countries, and in this context:

8.2.1. ensure that citizens are informed of the possibilities for using such languages and to actively promote users' real exercise of this right;

8.2.2. ensure that the employees of public administrations or services which communicate with users are able to provide information and services in the respective regional or minority languages;

8.2.3. promote and encourage the use of regional or minority languages at local and regional level; with this aim in mind, actively encourage municipal authorities to ensure the use of such languages in practice, in particular through an adequate employment policy, providing language training for employees and making information and services available on the internet in relevant languages;

8.2.4. ensure that place names and all topographical indications are written in their correct form, including on signs indicating entry into or exit from urban areas and on all other road signs providing information;

8.2.5. ensure that companies and bodies offering public services also use the regional or minority language in question; ensure, even in cases where the member State has made the weakest commitment defined in Article 10.3 of the charter, that a sufficient number of employees speak that language in the institution offering such services and that the necessary information for obtaining access to such services is also provided in the language in question; if none of the above-mentioned solutions is possible, the user should be offered the assistance of an interpreter;

8.3. with regard to the media:

8.3.1. promote the use of regional or minority languages by adopting legal and regulatory standards, as well as by means of appropriate incentives in their media policy;

8.3.2. refrain from prescribing restrictive legal and political measures, such as subtitling/ translation obligations and mandatory quotas for programmes in the official language, etc.;

8.3.3. ensure appropriate funding or grants for organisations or media which represent minorities to enhance the quality of content, so that they can draw the attention of the majority community to the identity, language, history and culture of minorities;

8.3.4. allow and promote the presence of regional or minority language media on online interfaces;

8.4. with regard to culture:

8.4.1. take into consideration the national and regional proportion of speakers of regional or minority languages and the number of their communities when preparing the part of their budget allocated to culture, consult these communities when allocating budgetary means and, where feasible, provide the resources necessary to develop the cultural life of the minority(ies) in question;

8.4.2. ensure that a reasonable proportion of posts in national and regional bodies responsible for the cultural content of the media are allocated to representatives of regional or minority languages;

8.4.3. take into consideration, when drafting legal norms and other regulations concerning cultural grants, all artistic works written in the country's minority language(s) and not make it compulsory for such publications to be translated into the official language;

8.4.4. ensure the availability of staff speaking the language in question in cultural institutions in areas where the speakers of regional or minority languages are traditionally present;

8.4.5. consider regional or minority languages as a factor that enriches the national culture, and consequently take speakers of those languages into consideration and include them in decisions concerning the thrust and priorities of the State's foreign cultural policy.

9. The Assembly calls on member States to ensure mutual comprehension between all linguistic groups in each country in order to foster the broadest possible co-operation and cohabitation among communities of member States.

10. The Assembly invites national parliaments to consider creating a special working group with the task of studying practical solutions to better protect and promote regional or minority languages.