Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Language rights in healthcare: enforcing bilingual obligations in Brussels public hospitals

Motion for a resolution
tabled by Mr Bob De BRABANDERE and other members of the Assembly

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

The Brussels-Capital Region is officially bilingual under Belgian law. Public hospitals in Brussels are legally bound to provide services in both Dutch and French. Emergency services across the board are explicitly covered by the same bilingual obligation.

In practice, Dutch-speaking patients in Brussels public hospitals consistently face severe difficulties in receiving care in their own language, despite this legal obligation. This de facto situation amounts to pseudo-bilingualism, with French systematically prevailing across the sector.

Most Brussels hospital beds fall under the Common Community Commission (GGC/COCOM), which provides the institutional and financial framework for bicommunal healthcare. The existence of this framework proves there is no structural or financial barrier to maintaining bilingual services. Enforcement of linguistic obligations nonetheless remains structurally inadequate.

Access to healthcare in one's own language, provided it is an official language, is not merely a matter of comfort: it is a fundamental prerequisite for patient safety. Miscommunication in diagnosis, informed consent and treatment instructions can have serious, potentially life-threatening consequences.

The Parliamentary Assembly should call on the Belgian authorities to take effective measures to enforce existing bilingual obligations in Brussels public hospitals, including through adequate staffing policies, targeted language training and meaningful complaint and sanction mechanisms.

The Assembly should prepare a report on the effective enforcement of language rights in healthcare in officially multilingual regions across Council of Europe member States.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed[1]*:*

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1. ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
ECPA: European Conservatives, Patriots and Affiliates