



Resolution 1769 (2010)¹

Final version

Strengthening measures to protect and revive highly endangered languages

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Languages are an invaluable part of cultural heritage and linguistic diversity is a fundamental element of cultural diversity, which should be preserved and promoted. Various international legal instruments contribute to their protection, not only through the general principle of non-discrimination on the grounds of language in relation to fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, but also in a more direct way by enshrining the right to maintain and use one's own language as a component of the right to participate in cultural life.
2. Thus, Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that: "In those States in which ... linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture ... or to use their own language." A similar provision is included in Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, according to which a child belonging to a linguistic minority or who is indigenous "shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture ... or to use his or her own language".
3. The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions of 2005 stipulates in its Article 7 (on measures to promote cultural expressions) that "1. Parties shall endeavour to create in their territory an environment which encourages individuals and social groups: (a) to create, produce, disseminate, distribute and have access to their own cultural expressions, paying due attention to the special circumstances and needs of women as well as various social groups, including persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples ...". In addition, according to Article 8, parties may take all appropriate measures to protect and preserve cultural expressions which are "at risk of extinction, under serious threat, or otherwise in need of urgent safeguarding".
4. Finally, languages (and language diversity) are also to be protected as an indispensable vehicle for the transmission of "intangible cultural heritage", as stipulated in Article 2, paragraph 2, of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.
5. Notwithstanding the provisions on language protection contained in several of these human rights standard-setting instruments, some 230 languages have become extinct during the last fifty years and many more are at risk and predicted to disappear within this century. These are, in particular, languages of small communities, which are used only by a limited number of people, usually the most elderly, and no longer taught to children by their parents. Such languages, which are no longer transmitted to the next generation, cannot survive without sustained support by the competent authorities and the immediate adoption of measures designed to reverse this trend.
6. The situation in Europe is particularly worrying: European language diversity is relatively poor in comparison with other regions of the world and most European languages are in danger.

1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 12 November 2010 (see [Doc. 12423](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education, rapporteur: Mr Kumcuoğlu). See also [Recommendation 1943 \(2010\)](#).*



7. The protection of cultural heritage, including languages, is among the key aims of the Council of Europe. The preamble of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148) highlights the value of multilingualism and emphasises that the protection of historical languages which are in danger of extinction contributes to the maintenance and development of Europe's cultural wealth and traditions, as well as to the building of a Europe based on the principles of democracy and cultural diversity.

8. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and its monitoring mechanism have produced positive developments. Some member states have used the ratification instrument for officially recognising the status of certain minority languages such as Low German in Germany, Scots in the United Kingdom, Limburgish in the Netherlands, Cypriot Maronite Arabic in Cyprus and Karelian in Finland. The Parliamentary Assembly acknowledges this as a good way of protecting and reviving highly endangered languages and encourages other member states to follow this practice.

9. The Assembly has already highlighted, and stresses again, the need to preserve the culture and language of minority groups. It refers to its [Recommendation 1775 \(2006\)](#) on the situation of Finno-Ugric and Samoyed peoples, [Recommendation 1521 \(2001\)](#) on Csango minority culture in Romania, [Recommendation 1333 \(1997\)](#) on the Aromanian culture and language and [Recommendation 1291 \(1996\)](#) on Yiddish culture, among others.

10. The Assembly recalls that each language mirrors a unique historical, social, cultural and ecological knowledge, as well as an inimitable human experience and view of the world. Hence it is seriously concerned by the negative trends observed in language diversity and vitality. Only new impetus and increased effort both at European and national levels may lead to a reversal of these trends and to a revitalisation of highly endangered languages.

11. The Assembly considers that immediate action is required in this field. This is essential not only because the right to use one's own language is an inalienable right and must be protected effectively, but also because linguistic standardisation is a threat to the cultural identity of Europe, which is and must remain multifaceted.

12. Therefore, the Assembly calls on member states to:

12.1. provide continued support to the revival of languages traditionally used in their territories and in particular those which are highly endangered, so as to ensure the enjoyment of language rights without discrimination and to develop inclusive policies and targeted action plans seeking, in particular, to:

12.1.1. raise people's awareness of the importance of preserving these languages and interest vis-à-vis the culture they underpin;

12.1.2. encourage transmission of these languages to younger generations and improvement of children's fluency in their native language;

12.1.3. encourage the use of these languages in daily communication and in a wide range of domains;

12.1.4. support learning of these languages at all levels of education;

12.1.5. collect and process statistics on these languages while ensuring protection of privacy;

12.1.6. collect, preserve and make accessible public documents and all kinds of material in these languages.

12.2. in implementing these policies, make full use of opportunities offered by the media and new information technologies, and facilitate networking, joint action and partnerships, including between public and private institutions, in the development of targeted cultural activities and initiatives.