



Doc. 14601

06 July 2018

The protection and promotion of regional or minority languages in Europe

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 2118 (2018)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers welcomes Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2118 \(2018\)](#) on “The protection and promotion of regional or minority languages in Europe”, which it has transmitted to the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, for information and possible comments.
2. Coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the entry into force of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the recommendation is a very timely political initiative by the Parliamentary Assembly in support of this very important treaty of the Council of Europe. For its part, the Committee of Ministers will use the anniversary as an opportunity to seek to bring a new dynamic to the Charter. Under the Croatian Chairmanship, which has included the Charter among its priorities, an international conference on the subject took place in Strasbourg on 18 and 19 June 2018. Bringing together many actors and stakeholders, the event provided the opportunity to assess what has been achieved thus far with the Charter, to consider how it may be made more effective by strengthening its supervisory mechanism and to identify current challenges as well as possible responses to these from the Council of Europe.
3. The call in the recommendation for more States to ratify the Charter, and for the existing States Parties to ensure its implementation and to consider taking on additional obligations (paragraph 4.1), while also supporting the principle of acquired rights in the field of minority language rights, is supported by the Committee of Ministers. It regularly invites those States that have not done so to consider signing and/or ratifying the Charter. As indicated above, the Charter will be given special prominence during the Croatian Chairmanship, and the importance of wider ratification will be underlined on that occasion. This is already the subject of continuing efforts on the part of the Council of Europe, which engages with the relevant national authorities in order to promote ratification of the Charter by raising awareness, providing legal advice and building capacity. Mention may be made in this respect of the Council of Europe's Action Plan for Georgia (2016-2019), one of the objectives of which is the promotion and implementation of minority rights and languages in accordance with the standards of the Charter. Similarly, the Council of Europe's Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova (2017-2020) supports a scheme to apply the standards of the Charter in pilot municipalities by building their capacity to implement relevant activities. A further recent example is the meeting held in December 2017 with relevant stakeholders in Portugal to discuss the possibility of that country's acceptance of the Charter.
4. As regards the issue of delays in the monitoring procedure (paragraph 4.2), it can be noted that the international conference on the protection of identity through language rights, jointly organised by Hungary and the Council of Europe in Budapest on 13 and 14 November 2017, was devoted partly to this. The Committee of Ministers will shortly be considering a set of proposals aimed at ensuring that States Parties submit their reports on time.

1. Adopted at the 1321st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (4 July 2018).



5. The recommendation requests the Committee of Ministers to report to the Parliamentary Assembly on the Charter's monitoring procedure and the results obtained (paragraph 4.3). Given that the Secretary General reports to the Parliamentary Assembly every two years on the application of the Charter (as required by Article 16), the Committee of Ministers does not consider that a parallel report covering essentially the same issues would be a useful exercise. The existing working contacts between the Parliamentary Assembly and the Committee of Experts may also be mentioned here.

6. Regarding the suggestion of bringing in an annual prize for countries to recompense their efforts on behalf of regional or minority languages (paragraph 4.4), the Committee of Ministers expresses its reservations at the idea. It recalls that the Charter is a binding international treaty; States Parties comply with its standards as a matter of legal obligation. It does not seem appropriate to link such compliance to an official prize. The efforts and achievements of States Parties are reflected and given due credit in the reports drawn up by the Committee of Experts. The Committee of Ministers could, however, give consideration to a proposal for a prize for the protection of regional or minority languages by other actors.

7. The various means suggested for improving the application of the Charter (paragraph 4.5) are all undoubtedly useful. They are already used to a certain extent by the Committee of Experts and its Secretariat in the course of their monitoring and promotional work. The Committee of Ministers also recalls a fundamental principle of international law that a State is only bound by those treaty obligations for which it has expressed its consent. Following the Croatian Chairmanship conference, reflection will continue on new methods and means to safeguard and promote the use of regional or minority languages in Europe.

8. As for co-operation with the European Union in this context (paragraph 4.6), this is exemplified in the current Council of Europe/European Union Partnership for Good Governance projects on protecting national minorities and minority languages in Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Belarus, and on strengthening the protection of national minorities and minority languages in Ukraine. The Committee of Ministers is ready to explore the possibility of further co-operation in this field with the relevant European Union institutions.