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## Protecting and promoting sign languages in Europe

**Reply to Recommendation<sup>1</sup>:** Recommendation 2143 (2018)  
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully considered Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2143 \(2018\)](#) "Protecting and promoting sign languages in Europe". It has drawn the recommendation to the attention of member States and communicated it to the competent entities of the Council of Europe for information and possible comments.<sup>2</sup>
2. The Committee of Ministers concurs with the Parliamentary Assembly of the importance of sign languages as natural languages of deaf persons and welcomes the fact that several member States grant the status of official language to their national sign languages. It recognises that it would be of importance to improve the understanding of how sign languages are protected and promoted in all Council of Europe member States. Referring to paragraph 4.3 of the recommendation, it underlines however that the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was not set up or drafted so as to protect sign languages and that its Committee of Experts is at present not in a position to request States to provide information on the status and the protection of sign languages.
3. The Committee of Ministers refers to the Council of Europe's longstanding Language Policy Programme and to the work of the Enlarged Partial Agreement, the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (ECML). At the heart of all of the Council of Europe's work in the field of language education, lie the concepts of plurilingualism/pluriculturalism, which were first introduced to language education in 1996 and led to the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in 2001.
4. The Committee of Ministers considers that plurilingual education and the wealth of resources produced by the Council of Europe in this regard, may contribute to the inclusion of deaf persons; the promotion and improvement of teaching of sign languages; and learning of sign languages not only by deaf children but also by their peers, teachers and family members. Examples of good practice of plurilingual education for spoken languages may be adapted to sign languages.
5. Regarding the Assembly's proposal in paragraph 4.2, the Committee of Ministers would like to make reference to recent developments relating to sign languages. The Council of Europe's CEFR Companion Volume, published in 2018, contains descriptors which were developed specifically for signing competences and contribute to defining common learning targets, curricula and levels for education in sign languages, drawing on the work of the ECML in this domain. Moreover, the Centre in Graz has created on its website for the European Day of Languages (EDL) a thematic area dedicated to professionals working in the field, linked the EDL to the International Day of Sign Languages and included facts and resources on sign languages for learners.

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1. Adopted at the 1346<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (14 May 2019).

2. Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice (CDPPE) and European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe.



6. The first ECML project on sign languages, ProSign 1 has established European standards for sign languages for professional purposes in line with the CEFR which have now been referenced in the CEFR Companion Volume. These descriptors, as well as other aspects of the CEFR, are increasingly used to structure courses in sign languages.

7. The current ProSign 2 project is working on a professionally-oriented competency framework for sign language teachers, as well as B2 level materials and learning activities from different European sign languages. It is developing a European language portfolio (ELP) that takes account of any modality-specific requirements for sign languages.

8. In the light of these elements, the Committee of Ministers has considered with interest the Assembly's proposal to set up a working group on the status and protection of sign languages in the Council of Europe member States with a view to the possible drafting of standards for the protection of sign languages. It will consider the possibility of exploring further this subject within the Council of Europe framework with a view to protecting and promoting sign languages in Europe. However, the Committee of Ministers underlines that the setting up of additional activities and/or structures seems difficult, in view of the current budgetary situation, unless they could be based on the existing budget envelope of the Organisation's competent entities. Finally, it informs the Assembly that the Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice and the European Centre for Modern Languages will organise a conference on sign languages in Graz, on 5 and 6 December 2019, to give visibility to sign languages.