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Application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (2023-2024)

Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to the Parliamentary Assembly

Communication
Secretary General of the Council of Europe

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1. Introduction

1. Opened for signature in November 1992, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (hereinafter "the Charter"; ETS No. 148) came into force on 1st March 1998. In 2023, the Council of Europe marked the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Charter, an important junction to take stock of the achievements and the challenges ahead.

2. Article 16, paragraph 5 of the Charter states that "The Secretary General of the Council of Europe shall make a two-yearly detailed report to the Parliamentary Assembly on the application of the Charter".[1]

3. This twelfth report, covering the period 2023-2024,[2] reflects on the situation of the signatures and ratifications by Council of Europe member states. It reports on the monitoring of states parties' compliance with the Charter and highlights the actions taken to improve the impact of the Charter at national and local levels. Through presenting the recent activities of the Committee of Experts of the Charter, this report also aims at summarising the relations with other relevant entities of the Council of Europe, with the European Union and other international organisations and institutions.

4. In the Reykjavík Declaration adopted in their 4th Summit on 17-18 May 2023, the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe reaffirmed, among others, "*their commitment to developing mutual understanding among the peoples of Europe and reciprocal appreciation of our cultural diversity and heritage*".[3] They also stressed "*the important role that the Council of Europe is playing to promote and protect the rights of persons belonging to national minorities*".[4]

5. The Charter is one of the key conventions of the Council of Europe. It is the only treaty in the world that aims to protect and promote regional or minority languages and provides its states parties with a common and internationally recognised framework for their language policy. Together with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, they are frames of reference that represent the European standards in the area of the protection of national minorities, and their languages, their history and culture respectively.

6. It is therefore of concern that ratification of the Charter has not moved forward in Council of Europe member states for years. Efforts must be multiplied.

7. The active role of the Parliamentary Assembly as one of the statutory bodies of the Council of Europe is key in safeguarding the principles of human rights, the rule of law and democracy. It is essential that its members continue to keep on their political agenda the commitments of Council of Europe member states and obligations of states parties to Council of Europe treaties. The role of the Parliamentary Assembly is also key in raising awareness of the Charter, and in actively supporting member states' policies aiming at strengthening the protection and promotion of regional or minority languages traditionally spoken in Europe.

2. Signatures and ratifications of the Charter by Council of Europe member states: state of play

8. The Charter was opened for signature on 5 November 1992 and entered into force on 1 March 1998. To date, it has been ratified by the following 25 states: Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. It is open to accession by non-Council of Europe states, provided that they have been formally invited to accede by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

9. Except from Portugal, no new signature happened during neither the current, nor the past reporting period.[5] None of the eight Council of Europe member states, which have signed the Charter proceeded to ratification. It is important to note that Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and North Macedonia have all committed themselves to ratify the Charter upon acceding to the Council of Europe. It is

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1. See: The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (the Charter).
2. The first biennial report was presented to the Parliamentary Assembly in 2000 (Doc. 8879), the second report in 2002 (Doc. 9540), the third in 2005 (Doc. 10659), the fourth in 2007 (Doc. 11442), the fifth in 2009 (Doc. 12300), the sixth in 2011 (Doc. 12881), the seventh in 2013 (Doc. 13436), the eighth in 2015 (Doc. 13993), the ninth in 2017 (Doc. 14530), the tenth in 2020 (Doc. 15276) and the eleventh in 2023 (Doc. 15743). These reports are available at www.coe.int/minlang.
3. See: The Reykjavík Declaration, p.3.
4. See: The Reykjavík Declaration, p.5.
5. Portugal signed the Charter in September 2021, but no state has ratified the Charter since 2010.

also important to note that the ratification of the Charter by the older member states of the Council of Europe would show a clear commitment to these European standards and thus, showing their European solidarity on a matter which clearly reflects the basic values of the Council of Europe.

10. The protection of regional or minority languages contributes to the maintenance and development of Europe's cultural wealth and traditions, which are important basis for our democracies. The Charter aims at achieving this goal by promoting the use of regional and minority languages in public life (education, judicial authorities, administrative authorities and public services, media, cultural activities and facilities, economic and social life, and cross-border exchanges). At the same time, it recognises that "*the protection and encouragement of regional or minority languages should not be to the detriment of the official languages and the need to learn them*".[6]

3. Monitoring the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in the states parties

11. The implementation of the Charter is monitored by the Committee of Experts. Its 24[7] independent experts examine the situation of regional or minority languages in the states parties, in line with their commitments under the Charter. In this framework it adopts recommendations for both immediate and further actions, and reports to the Committee of Ministers on its evaluation of states' compliance. Based on the evaluation reports and recommendations of the Committee of Experts, the Committee of Ministers, for its part, also adopts recommendations and decisions, as part of the process of monitoring the application of the Charter in the states parties.[8]

12. Following the clearance of the backlogs caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Committee of Experts carried out eleven on-the-spot visits during the reference period, namely to Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and to the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man. It also examined the implementation of recommendations for immediate action in respect of six states parties.

3.1. Recommendations and decisions of the Committee of Ministers

13. During the reference period, the Committee of Ministers adopted and published the following recommendations and decisions, relating to the respective evaluation reports of the Committee of Experts.[9]

2023

– 19 April, the Netherlands, recommendation CM/RecChL(2023)1 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by the Netherlands;

– 19 April, Sweden, recommendation CM/RecChL(2023)2 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Sweden;

– 28 June, Cyprus, decision CM/Del/Dec(2023)1470/10.2b, evaluation by the Committee of Experts on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action contained in the Committee of Experts' sixth evaluation report on Cyprus;

– 28 June, Norway, decision CM/Del/Dec(2023)1470/10.2c, evaluation by the Committee of Experts on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action contained in the Committee of Experts' eighth evaluation report on Norway;

– 4 October, Austria, recommendation CM/RecChL(2023)3 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Austria;

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6. See: the Charter (preamble).
7. There are currently 24 experts, as the seat of Bosnia and Herzegovina remains vacant, pending the nomination of candidates by the Government.
8. In its decision of 28 November 2018 on "strengthening the monitoring mechanism of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages", in the wake of the High-Level Conference held in Strasbourg on 18 and 19 June 2018 by the Croatian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, the Committee of Ministers approved a comprehensive reform of the Charter's monitoring mechanism, which came into force on 1 July 2019.
9. The 2018 reform introduced a procedure for reporting on the implementation of recommendations for immediate action at the mid-point of the five-year monitoring cycle. The Committee of Ministers decisions are part of this procedure. All the evaluation reports and the associated recommendations made by the Committee of Experts are available at www.coe.int/minlang.

– 4 October, Serbia, recommendation CM/RecChL(2023)4 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Serbia;

– 13 December, Montenegro, recommendation CM/RecChL(2023)5 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Montenegro;

– 13 December, Romania, recommendation CM/RecChL(2023)7 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Romania;

2024

– 7 February, Switzerland, decision CM/Del/Dec(2024)1488/10.3, evaluation by the Committee of Experts on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action contained in the Committee of Experts' eighth evaluation report on Switzerland;

– 5 April, Denmark, recommendation CM/RecChL(2024)1 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Denmark;

– 7 May, Sweden, decision CM/Del/Dec(2024)1498/10.1a, evaluation by the Committee of Experts on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action contained in the Committee of Experts' eighth evaluation report on Sweden;

– 1 July, Croatia, recommendation CM/RecChL(2024)2 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Croatia;

– 1 July, Czechia, recommendation CM/RecChL(2024)3 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Czechia;

– 9 October, Finland, recommendation CM/RecChL(2024)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Finland;

– 9 October, the Netherlands, decision CM/Del/Dec(2024)1509/10.2c, evaluation by the Committee of Experts on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action contained in the Committee of Experts' seventh evaluation report on the Netherlands;

– 9 October, Germany, decision CM/Del/Dec(2024)1509/10.2b, evaluation by the Committee of Experts on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action contained in the Committee of Experts' seventh evaluation report on Germany;

– 19 November, United Kingdom, recommendation CM/RecChL(2024)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by the United Kingdom;

– 19 November, Spain, recommendation CM/RecChL(2024)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Spain.

14. As has been the case since 2001, the recommendations addressed by the Committee of Ministers to the states parties tie in with the proposals made by the Committee of Experts in its evaluation reports. This practice constitutes a significant sign of political support to the independent monitoring mechanism of the Charter.

15. In 2023, the HUDOC ECRML database was launched.[10] It contains the evaluation reports of the Committee of Experts of the Charter, the evaluations of the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action, the subsequent recommendations and decisions of the Committee of Ministers, the reports by the Secretary General to the Parliamentary Assembly on the application of the Charter, as well as statements by the Committee of Experts. This tool contributes to facilitate the work of states parties to the Charter, both at national and local levels, as well as of academic researchers and of non-governmental organisations. It also contributes to increasing the visibility and dissemination of the monitoring work conducted in the framework of the Charter.

3.2. Recommendations by the Committee of Experts: trends and recurring issues

16. Bearing in mind the various recommendations made by the Committee of Experts during the reference period, the following trends can be identified.

10. See: The HUDOC/ECRML database.

17. The Committee of Experts often recalls that as parties to the Charter, states have a legal obligation to oversee, co-ordinate and support the implementation of the provisions undertaken therein. It also pointed out multiple times during the referred period that state authorities are to take a more proactive approach to enhance the protection of minority languages. The Committee of Experts repeatedly emphasised that having a specific policy and/or a strategy at national level in place contributes to a more effective implementation of the obligations stemming from the provisions of the Charter. In addition, adequate and consistent financing is imperative to achieve results.

18. It is of utmost importance that the representatives of the speakers are included and consulted in designing and/or implementing national policy or strategy relevant to the protection and promotion of their respective regional or minority languages. The Committee of Experts often noted however that states' authorities miss this obligation. In some cases, speakers' representatives were not consulted neither during the drafting of the periodic report, nor during the mid-term reporting procedure, which is contrary to the spirit of the Charter.[11]

19. Some states parties continue to face systemic difficulties in applying the Charter. Many recommendations have been reiterated over the various monitoring cycles. For example, the Committee of Experts regularly reminds state authorities about the importance of promoting and teaching regional or minority languages at all levels of education to effectively secure their protection and transmission to the next generations. The use of regional or minority languages in pre-school education forms the basis for a comprehensive knowledge of the language. To achieve better results in general, the Committee of Experts often invites the state authorities to consider the possibility of supporting this aim, also financially, including by addressing teacher recruitment and training, and investing in new teaching materials. All these shall be achieved in close co-operation with relevant regional and/or local authorities, and in consultation with representatives of the speakers.

20. The shortage of trained language teachers has been a problem in many states parties. Addressing this issue requires a more comprehensive approach than aiming at recruiting people with appropriate knowledge of the language. States parties need to have long-term strategies to attract the younger generation not only to invest more in their language proficiency, but to be ready to engage in this profession by offering a predictable professional career cycle to teachers of regional or minority languages, with adequate job and financial security in a long term.

21. In addition, the insufficient use of minority or regional languages in the media continues to be addressed in the recommendations of the Committee of Experts, as well as in relations to the administrative authorities and regional and/or local services. With regards to these provisions, the Committee of Experts continued to encourage all states parties to the Charter to determine, in co-operation with the speakers, in what areas regional or minority language speakers are traditionally present in sufficient numbers for the purposes of the undertakings entered into under Article 10 (administrative authorities and public services), irrespective of thresholds, and to apply the undertakings ratified under Article 10 in those areas on a sustainable basis.

22. Finally, the Committee of Experts regularly observes that the society as a whole is not adequately informed of the presence of regional or minority languages in their respective countries, and that the history and culture surrounding these languages are not, or not adequately, present in school curricula or taught otherwise to non-speakers.

3.3. Ongoing challenges

23. First, it is essential that states submit their periodic reports on time in order to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of the monitoring procedure. Delays not only disrupt the work programme of the Committee of Experts, but more importantly, endanger the effectiveness of the evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action by the Committee of Experts, contained in their previously adopted evaluation reports. The delays in the monitoring procedure ultimately puts at risk the reform agreed upon in 2018, and the related achievements to strengthen the effectiveness of the entire monitoring mechanism.

24. As for many other Council of Europe instruments, the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee of Ministers and the Committee of Experts is an ongoing challenge. It is often recalled in this respect that a more direct link should be established between these recommendations and the co-operation

11. According to articles 6 and 7.4 of the Charter it is necessary to inform the organisations concerned of the recommendations made during the monitoring, and to take into consideration the needs and wishes expressed by them in the implementation and related reporting.

activities by the Council of Europe (including those carried out under joint programmes with the EU). On this basis, whenever possible, co-operation projects targeting the main issues identified by the Committee of Experts should be proposed to all states parties after the relevant evaluation report is published and should become a regular feature of the implementation process of the Charter. They should equally be integral parts of Council of Europe action plans. Successful implementation is based on ownership. States parties, together with all relevant national stakeholders shall be driving the process of implementation. In this context, the added value and importance of follow up activities, such as the implementation roundtables, organised by the Council of Europe and the state authorities is to be emphasised. Their aim is not only to promote and inform about the procedure, but also to identify effective ways to implement the recommendations of the Committee of Experts.[12] Such roundtables shall be organised more regularly, and states parties shall be more engaged in this process. It is important to note that adequate and regular funding is essential to achieve results in implementing recommendations.

25. As the Charter is a living instrument, its provisions must continue to be interpreted in the light of current living conditions and developments in our society, such as digitalisation in the fields of public administration and services, or media and the rise of artificial intelligence. The Committee of Experts regularly addresses these developments and assesses its own working methods and analysis accordingly. During the Committee of Experts' 80th plenary meeting, in November 2024, a thematic session was dedicated to the digital inclusion of endangered/regional or minority languages, where two exchanges were organised. The objective of the first exchange was to explore the current landscape of new media and their potential role in promoting regional and minority languages. In the context of the second, the experts discussed the digital inclusion of endangered indigenous languages with the representatives of Lenovo and Motorola, its technical and financial implications, the importance of community acceptance and of language-related scientific support during the process. Further thought must be given to ensuring that the monitoring work of experts takes into account current advances, particularly in new technologies, and their potential contribution to the promotion and protection of regional or minority languages.

26. Lastly, more efforts shall be done in reaching out to the youth and actively engage them in the promotion and protection of regional and minority languages, as an expression of cultural wealth. Good examples in states parties show that against existing generation gaps, with comprehensive strategy and amplified efforts, endangered languages can be revitalised, and younger generation can be interested in learning the regional and minority languages of their ancestors.

3.4. Recent developments in strengthening protection and further recommendations

27. In addition to raising awareness of the Charter and promoting its signature and ratification, the Committee of Experts continues to invite its states parties to regularly accept additional undertakings under the Charter to reflect improvements in the situation with regard to their regional or minority languages, for example in the case of Serbia.[13] Moreover, the Council of Europe provides legal advice as part of its co-operation activities, organises awareness-raising events and holds discussions with the competent national authorities to this end.

28. During the current reporting period, two states parties extended their commitments under the Charter, which is a welcomed development:

– On 22 January 2024, the Netherlands notified the Council of Europe that they have accepted the application of the provisions of the Charter to be extended to the Caribbean Part of the Netherlands (the islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba), as well as the extension of the Charter's provisions under Part III to the Papiamentu language on the Island of Bonaire. Furthermore, on 1 July 2024, the Netherlands notified the Council of Europe of the extension of the protection of the Papiamento/ Papiamentu language under Part II to the European part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

– On 28 February 2024, Czechia notified the Council of Europe that it will apply Part III of the Charter to German in a part of the territory where German is traditionally used, namely in the districts of Cheb, Karlovy Vary, Sokolov, Liberec, Ústí nad Labem, Český Krumlov, Opava and Svitavy.

12. The representatives of the national authorities at all levels, the representatives of the speakers, as well as the members of the Committee of Experts of the Charter and the Secretariat of the Council of Europe take part in these implementation roundtables.

13. See: Fifth evaluation report on Serbia

29. Czechia, Denmark, Germany and the United Kingdom are preparing the upgrading of their ratification instruments to extend the protection to regional or minority languages. In the Netherlands, the Province of Limburg intends to improve the use and visibility of the Limburgish language in the years to come with a view of extending its protection also to Part III of the Charter.[14]

30. The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities also plays a role in this respect and has in several opinions invited states parties to the Framework Convention to ratify the Charter.[15] It also calls on the authorities of those states parties who have committed to do so, to comply with their post-accession commitment by ratifying the Charter.

31. Lastly, the Council of Europe action plans aiming at supporting specific countries' efforts to bring their legislation, institutions and practice further in line with Council of Europe standards regarding human rights, democracy and the rule of law can be additional catalysators to effectively prepare for the ratification of the Charter.[16]

3.5. Statements by the Committee of Experts and awareness raising activities

32. During the reference period, in particular in the context of the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Charter, a number of tools and pieces of work were published, together with a statement issued by the Committee of Experts.

33. In November 2023, a new booklet[17] was published, highlighting the relevance of the Charter for European regional or minority languages and the work of its Committee of Experts. The brochure aims at providing information on the monitoring process and illustrating the standards the Charter requires. It was translated and published in nine languages and is disseminated during on-the-spot visits, conferences and events.

34. The updated third edition of the collected texts[18] of the Charter was published in October 2023, followed by the fourth edition[19] in October 2024, containing, along with the text of the Charter and its explanatory report, the most relevant and recent decisions of the Committee of Ministers and the Rules of Procedure of the Committee of Experts. It further provides the state of signatures and ratifications as well as reservations and declarations. In addition to having a user-friendly compilation of all important texts related to the Charter, the publication aims at raising awareness of the most recent developments, targeting government experts, representatives of regional or minority language speakers and non-governmental organisations or other interested parties.

35. On 25 September 2023, on the occasion of the European Day of Languages (26 September) and in the context of the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Charter, a video[20] was published, presenting its impact. The video also showcases specific examples of measures put in place in states parties to the Charter, in different sectors from private and public life to guarantee speakers of regional or minority languages to use them in their daily life. It is available in English and French, with sub-titles in German, Hungarian, Romanian and Spanish.

36. On 1 March 2023, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Charter, Aleksandra Oszmiańska-Pagett, Chair of the Committee of Experts issued a statement underlining its unique nature, importance and added value to human rights protection in general. The statement also emphasised the need of promoting further this important instrument and that the accession to the Charter remains a necessary precondition for all regional and minority languages in Europe to continue to be safeguarded, protected and promoted.[21]

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14. See: Provincie zet vol in op Deil-III-erkinning veur de Limburgse taal in 2030 – Provincie Limburg.
15. See: for example, the Fifth opinion of the Advisory Committee of the FCNM on Albania (para. 81.).
16. The Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova (2025-2028), adopted on 19 November 2024 by the Committee of Ministers is an important example in this respect.
17. See: https://rm.coe.int/prems-115323-gbr-2569-langues-regionales-et-minoritaires-a5-2023-4-/1680ad47a0 The booklet is available in English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Portuguese, Romani, Spanish and Ukrainian.
18. See: https://rm.coe.int/collected-texts-charter-3e-edition-gbr/1680acca81.
19. See: https://rm.coe.int/collected-texts-charter-4th-edition-en/1680b26fa0.
20. See: European Day of Languages: how the Language Charter contributes to maintaining and developing regional or minority languages – European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.
21. See: Appendix 2.

37. The Committee of Experts adopted a statement on the legal framework for the implementation of the Charter in Ukraine at their 76th plenary meeting on 16 June 2023.[22] In their statement, the Committee of Experts "*welcomes the opinion on the Law on National Minorities (Communities) of Ukraine, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 135th Plenary Session (Venice, 9-10 June 2023), which provides important guidance to the Ukrainian authorities on how to improve the protection of national minorities and minority languages in Ukraine"*. The statement also aimed at providing guidance to the Ukrainian authorities on how to strengthen the protection of minority languages protected under the Charter.

38. On the occasion of the International Romani Language Day, the Division of National Minorities and Minority Languages and the Roma and Travellers Division of the Council of Europe and the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) co-hosted the 5th edition the "Safeguarding Romani Language" conference, in Strasbourg (5 November 2024).[23] During the conference experts and practitioners of Romani language, educators and academics debated on Council of Europe standards and promising policies relevant to the protection, promotion and harmonisation of the Romani language. A presentation was delivered focusing on the findings and recommendations of the Committee of Experts of the Charter, as well as promising practices in states parties.

39. Lastly, within the 12th edition of the World Forum for Democracy (6 – 8 November 2024) organised annually in the Council of Europe, a Forum Talk on "How to Counter Discrimination and Promote Equality and Diversity to Transcend Divides in Society?' was organised by the Anti-discrimination Department of the Council of Europe. A representative of the Committee of Experts participated in this panel discussion and underlined the importance of protecting and promoting the linguistic rights of national minorities, particularly in relation to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

4. Actions taken to improve the impact of the Charter at regional and local level and strengthen inter-institutional and international relations

4.1. The role of local and regional authorities

40. The Committee of Experts has confirmed in its reports that the role of local and regional authorities in protecting and promoting regional or minority languages is essential. This can especially be noted in fields such as education, local and regional administration, transfrontier exchanges, media, culture or health services, as these activities and services fall under the responsibility of local and regional authorities in line with the principle of subsidiarity. The Committee of Experts however regularly pointed out the lack of effective information flow from the state to local authorities and that these latter are often not aware of the international commitments undertaken under the Charter by the respective state party.

41. In order to support and promote the Charter in the states parties and among those Council of Europe member states which have not yet ratified it, several initiatives have been conducted at regional and local level so that those authorities which have expressed an interest in the Charter can implement its provisions in accordance with their competences.[24] Representatives of the users of different minority languages also underline the importance of these initiatives. The Committee of Experts has been always welcoming such pro-active approach at the level of municipalities to the application of the Charter, which also allows to build or reinforce the good co-operation between the authorities and the users of minority languages.

42. Adopting "local charters" in the states parties to the Charter can be successful initiatives to ensure a higher degree of protection for regional or minority languages that are already protected. Such was the case for example in the municipality of Kula (Vojvodina, Serbia), which adopted a decision to apply additional or stronger Part III undertakings falling into its competences concerning Hungarian, Ruthenian, Ukrainian and German, triggering also other municipalities in Vojvodina to prepare the adoption of comparable decisions concerning additional minority languages.[25]

43. Finally, a good example for awareness raising during the reference period is a public event hosted by the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences and Centre for Public Policy on 13-14 December 2023. Organised alongside the University of Edinburg, the event aimed at presenting both the Charter and the

22. See: Statement by the Committee of Experts on the legal framework for the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Ukraine unanimously adopted at its 76th plenary meeting (12-16 June 2023).
23. See: Safeguarding Romani Language – A step forward towards harmonisation of Romani language in Europe – European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.
24. See: https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/promoting-ratification-in-france.
25. See: Fifth evaluation report of the Committee of Experts on Serbia.

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the latest recommendations from the previous monitoring cycle concerning the United Kingdom, with a focus on Scotland. With representatives of both the Committee of Experts and the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention, as well as Scottish government officials and civil society actors, thematic discussions were also held on topics, linked to the effective protection of national minorities, including with a language focus. The event and the approach taken provided the opportunity for a more effective awareness raising, by communicating reinforcing and complementing messages.

4.2. Strengthening inter-institutional and international relations

4.2.1. Relations with the Parliamentary Assembly

44. The Parliamentary Assembly has a key role in raising awareness of the Charter and policies for the protection and promotion of regional or minority languages traditionally used in Europe. The recommendations of the Committee of Experts and the Committee of Ministers provide a basis for action by members of the Parliamentary Assembly to promote regional or minority languages in the states parties. The support of the Parliamentary Assembly and national parliaments continues to be essential, particularly to increase the number of ratifications of the Charter and the number of undertakings given by states parties.

45. Exchanges of views between parliamentarians and Charter experts can take place during monitoring visits or at hearings held by the Parliamentary Assembly. The Parliamentary Assembly may also refer matters to the Venice Commission (European Commission for Democracy Through Law), which can provide legal expertise to states on any constitutional or legislative issue relating to linguistic rights. In addition, written questions may be put to the Committee of Ministers on matters relating to the Charter.

46. To mark the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the Charter a hearing was organised by the Sub-Committee on the Rights of Minorities of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 27 April 2023 in Strasbourg (France).[26] During the event, the President[27] of the Parliamentary Assembly highlighted the importance of this unique legal instrument and reiterated the special role that the Parliamentary Assembly should play to enhance its visibility. He equally highlighted his commitment to the promotion of the ratification of the Charter and to continue this work in the context of his official visits also in the future.

47. On 5 December 2024, the President[28] of the Parliamentary Assembly addressed a keynote speech in the Interparliamentary Conference on 'Cultural Heritage and the Identity of National Communities' in Budapest (Hungary). He recalled the importance of the Council of Europe mechanisms and legal instruments in terms of protection and promotion of national minorities and regional or minority languages, stressing that the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages "*provide a widely recognised normative scheme in terms of minority protection*". The President underlined that "*the protection of national minorities and their languages is not only a matter of justice but also an imperative for the preservation of our cultural identity and social cohesion. In an increasingly multicultural world, safeguarding diversity is the foundation for a peaceful and just future*".[29]

4.2.2. Relations with the Committee of Ministers

48. The Committee of Ministers plays a central role in adopting recommendations and decisions as part of the monitoring of the application of the Charter in the states parties. In addition, it elects the members of the Committee of Experts. During the reference period, the Ministers' Deputies elected or re-elected six members of the Committee of Experts (four new experts in respect of the following states: Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom; two re-elected members of the Committee in respect of Cyprus and Serbia).

49. Exchanges of views are held with the Committee of Ministers' Rapporteur Group on Legal Co-operation (GR-J). Recommendations and decisions are discussed first in this framework before their adoption by the Committee of Ministers. On 13 June 2023, the Chair of the Committee of Experts held an exchange of views

26. See: 25th anniversary of the Language Charter: Hearing at the Parliamentary Assembly – European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.
27. Tiny Kox, President of the Parliamentary Assembly at the time of the event.
28. Theodoros Rousopoulos, President of the Parliamentary Assembly.
29. 'In an increasingly multicultural world, safeguarding diversity is the foundation for a peaceful and just future', PACE President says.

with the Rapporteur Group on Legal Co-operation, highlighting the challenges in the implementation of the Charter and the positive impact of the 2018 reform of its monitoring mechanism. The Chair also called on the member states of the Council of Europe, who have not yet done so, to ratify the Charter.

4.2.3. Relations with other Council of Europe bodies

50. On 1 January 2024, the Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) started its work under its new Terms of Reference.[30] In this framework, the CDADI is engaged to promote and facilitate awareness raising of Council of Europe standards, among others, in relation to regional or minority languages. Accordingly, the CDADI shall carry out a study on recurrent problematic areas in the field of regional or minority language protection and identify good practices in Council of Europe member states, as well as study data collection in relation to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and the use of regional or minority languages and identify good practices. The CDADI has set up a working group for this purpose. The Committee of Experts of the Charter is a participant at CDADI. A member of the Committee of Experts as well as the Secretariat of the Division of National Minorities and Minority Languages are following this work closely.

51. It is in this context that on 7 December 2023, the Chair of the Committee of Experts participated in an exchange of views with the CDADI. She emphasised that the study to be carried out on recurrent problematic areas in the field of regional or minority language protection and identification of good practices in member states could contribute to supporting states parties in fully implementing the Charter and the related monitoring recommendations and to encouraging more states to ratify it.

52. Contacts are also regular with other Council of Europe entities working on matters that may relate to discrimination, or multiple discrimination.

53. Other Council of Europe bodies, such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Venice Commission, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the various monitoring bodies regularly refer to the Charter and the conclusions of the Committee of Experts in their work, while at the same time enhancing the impact of the Charter's principles and specific provisions in their own ways.

54. Having an appointed Gender Equality Rapporteur (GER) in the Committee of Experts reinforces, inter alia the important work carried out by the Gender Equality Division of the Council of Europe. In this framework, the online HELP course on gender equality and gender mainstreaming, the Toolkit on gender mainstreaming in Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms: Gender mainstreaming in practice, as well as the Guidelines for the use of language as a driver of inclusivity were presented and disseminated in the Committee of Experts.

4.2.4. Relations with the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

55. In its decision of 28 November 2018 on "*strengthening the monitoring mechanism of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*", the Committee of Ministers emphasised that the Charter and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities have distinct aims and purposes and remain two separate instruments, giving rise to distinct obligations, with separate monitoring mechanisms and expert committees.

56. Strengthening relations between these two important treaties, unique in the world for protecting minority rights, has continued during the current reporting period. This is ensured on one hand by the Division of National Minorities and Minority Languages, assuming both respective secretariats together under one administrative entity within Directorate General II – Democracy and Human Dignity of the Council of Europe. As a tangible result of the greater cooperation of the two monitoring bodies was the launch of a common website to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of both treaties.[31] The joint anniversary webpage featured a statement from the Chair of the Committee of Experts, facts and figures about the Charter and a quiz.

57. The yearly meetings of the Heads of the Monitoring and Advisory Bodies of the Council of Europe are also opportunities to highlight relevant activities and enhance relations not only between the Committee of Experts and the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, but with other monitoring and advisory bodies.

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30. See: Terms of reference of the Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI).
31. See: 25 years of making diversity matter – National Minorities (FCNM).

4.2.5. Relations with the European Union

58. As a reference treaty on minority languages, the Charter's monitoring mechanism is of particular interest to the European Union. The recommendations and findings of the Committee of Experts are important benchmarks for assessing the progress made by candidate states in the accession to the European Union. Through the joint programmes between the EU and the Council of Europe, the European Union has traditionally played a key role in providing assistance and support to states preparing to ratify the Charter (legal advice, capacity building, awareness raising) and/or to the implementation of the recommendations made by the Committee of Experts.

59. Contacts are regular at secretariat level between the European Union and the Council of Europe and meetings take place to exchange information, in particular on countries which are in the process of acceding to the European Union.

60. On 11 December 2024, the Head of the Division of National Minorities and Minority Languages participated at a conference entitled “Challenges and prospects for national minority protection in Europe”, organised in the framework of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Brussels (Belgium), presenting the Charter, its important impact over the past decades, the challenges faced and the future prospects.

4.2.6. Civil society organisations and research institutes

61. The Committee of Experts has continued to be in contact with relevant civil society organisations. Representatives of the speakers are systematically met by members of the Committee of Experts during country visits. A webpage dedicated to the civil society organisations is available and contains information on how to contribute to the monitoring work.[32] Meetings organised by civil society organisations, in particular the European Language Equality Network (ELEN) were also attended by the members of the Committee of Experts during the current reporting period.

62. On 20 June 2024, the Committee of Experts held an exchange of views with researchers from the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) on the initial results of their research “*A pathway to expanding the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*”, which identifies key obstacles to ratification in seven Council of Europe member states and propose strategic recommendations for overcoming these obstacles. Members of the Committee of Experts were also involved in conferences organised by ECMI and contributed to its work during the reporting period. On 19 November 2024, at its 80th plenary meeting, the Committee of Experts held an exchange of views to explore the current landscape of new media and their potential role in promoting regional and minority languages. A representative of the European Association of Daily Newspapers in Minority and Regional Languages (MIDAS), as well as a researcher from ECMI were invited as guest speakers to present their relevant work.

4.2.7. Co-operation with other international organisations and institutions

63. The Committee of Experts of the Charter and its secretariat co-operate on an ad hoc basis with other international organisations and institutions (United Nations; OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities).

64. In 2023 and 2024 respectively, a representative of the Committee of Experts of the Charter and the Head of Division of National Minorities and Minority Languages of the Council of Europe addressed the annual session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva (Switzerland), where bilateral meetings also took place to enhance synergies with other international organisations and/or relevant partners. On 8 July 2023, the representative of the Committee of Experts participated at the advocacy meeting on a draft treaty on international minority rights, proposed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues to the Human Rights Council. The meeting provided the opportunity to recall the Charter as a unique international treaty in protecting and promoting traditional regional and minority languages, as well as to underline its added value, also internationally.

65. To mark the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the two key legal instruments of the Council of Europe pertaining to national minorities, the Framework Convention and the Charter, as well as the 30th anniversary of the opening of the office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in The Hague, a compilation of texts on national minority standards from the Council of Europe and the OSCE High

32. See: The role of NGOs in the implementation and monitoring of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages – European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

Commissioner on National Minorities were presented and a dedicated joint website was launched.[33] The joint webpage illustrates the long-standing and strong co-operation between and complementarity of the two organisations and is the resource of key documents in several languages.

5. Conclusion

66. Today, more than 80 regional or minority languages benefit from protection in the states parties to the Charter.[34] Their use is promoted in education, justice, public administration and services, media, cultural activities and facilities, economic and social life and transfrontier co-operation. The implementation of the provisions of the Charter contributes to the process of revitalisation of languages threatened with extinction and the Committee of Experts continues to be engaged in supporting these processes.

67. As Secretary General, I would like to reiterate that the Council of Europe continues to stand ready to provide states with all the assistance they need to complete the ratification process, as well as to implement the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers and the Committee of Experts. The support of the Parliamentary Assembly is an essential lever in this regard, and I invite its members to continue playing an important role in promoting and safeguarding diversity in Europe, as a basis for peace and stability in our continent.

33. See: Collection of Council of Europe and OSCE national minority standards – National Minorities (FCNM).
34. See the list of the languages covered by the Charter: https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages/languages-covered.

Appendix 1 – Brief overview of the Charter and the situation regarding signature and ratification

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is a convention designed to protect and promote States Parties' traditional minority languages and enable speakers of these languages to use them in both private and public life. It requires states parties to actively promote the use of regional or minority languages in education, courts, administration, media, culture, economic and social life, and cross-border co-operation.

The Charter goes beyond minority protection and anti-discrimination, requiring its states parties to take active promotional measures for the benefit of minority languages. The Council of Europe ensures that the Charter is implemented in practice and regularly monitors the commitments made by the states parties.

By imposing promotional obligations on states, the Charter complements the individual rights of minority language speakers arising from national and international minority protection. These provisions seek to give momentum to the implementation of minority rights in daily life. Together with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the Charter constitutes the Council of Europe's commitment to protect national minorities.

The Charter is based on an approach that fully respects national sovereignty and territorial integrity. It does not conceive the relationship between official languages and regional or minority languages in terms of competition or antagonism. Development of the latter must not obstruct knowledge and promotion of the former.

Regional or minority languages are part of Europe's cultural heritage and their protection and promotion contribute to the building of a Europe based on democracy and cultural diversity. The Charter applies to over 80 regional and minority languages, territorial or non-territorial languages and less widely used official languages. It covers only the languages traditionally used within a state's territory, not those connected with recent migratory movements or dialects of the official language.

Drawn up on the basis of a text put forward by the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, now the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Charter was adopted as a convention open for accession by non-Council of Europe states (ETS No. 148) on 25 June 1992 by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. The Charter was opened for signature on 5 November 1992 and has been in force since 1 March 1998.

To date, the following 25 states have ratified the Charter (listed in alphabetical order): Armenia, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. In addition, the Charter applies in the Isle of Man, an official British Crown dependency.

Eight Council of Europe member states have signed but not ratified the Charter: Azerbaijan, France, Iceland, Italy, Malta, North Macedonia, Republic of Moldova and Portugal. Five states undertook to ratify the Charter at the time of their accession to the Council of Europe but have not yet done so: Albania, Azerbaijan, Georgia, North Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova.

Appendix 2 – Statement by the Chair of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages on the 25th anniversary of the entry into force of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

1 March 2023, Strasbourg

Regional and minority languages are part of Europe's cultural and intangible heritage. The Council of Europe, aware that their protection and promotion contribute to the construction of a Europe based on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, adopted the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 1992, on the basis of preliminary work initiated in 1957 by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

This treaty, which today marks the 25th anniversary of its entry into force, obliges the 25 States Parties that have ratified it to actively promote the use of these languages in education, justice, administration, media, culture, economic and social life and cross-border cooperation.

The system of commitments adopted in the Charter allows for adaptation to the situation of each language, taking into account the social, political and economic contexts which shape them. It makes it possible to guarantee the use of each of the more than 80 regional and minority languages currently protected by the Charter in all sectors of everyday life. The Charter unquestionably contributes to the consolidation of a closer union between our people, while reinforcing the cultural diversity which is the strength of our continent.

For 25 years, the Committee of Independent Experts (COMEX), which monitors the implementation of the Charter, has been able to count on the support of national and European organisations for the promotion of regional or minority languages, which are essential partners in the pursuit of this common objective. Their expertise on the ground enables the COMEX to gather valuable information during its on-the-spot visits to the countries concerned.

On the basis of the COMEX evaluation reports and recommendations, as well as the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the States Parties have useful tools at their disposal to better develop and deploy policies on the use of regional and minority languages on a daily basis. As the Charter is a living instrument and is assessed in the light of current living conditions, new issues and challenges are now taken into consideration, such as the place given to regional and minority languages in new technologies, in social media or in the development of artificial intelligence.

For a quarter of a century, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages has been an instrument for rationalising and objectifying discussions on the protection and promotion of regional and minority languages. It must therefore be understood as such by all Council of Europe member states. Their accession to the Charter remains a necessary precondition for regional and minority languages to continue to be safeguarded, protected and promoted.