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**EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES**

**Initial periodical report  
presented to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe  
in accordance with Article 15 of the Charter**

**LUXEMBOURG**

## Introduction

Luxembourg signed the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages on 5 November 1992.

By way of introduction, attention should be drawn to the relatively unusual language situation in Luxembourg. The use of languages is governed not by the constitution, but by ordinary legislation. Under the Languages Law of 24 February 1984, “the national language of the Luxembourgers shall be Luxembourgian” (Article 1); “legislative instruments and their implementing regulations shall be drafted in French” (Article 2) and, “in contentious or non-contentious administrative matters and in judicial matters, French, German or Luxembourgian may be used” (Article 3). Luxembourgish, French and German are therefore used to differing degrees as working and drafting languages and for formal and informal communication.

The origins of Luxembourg’s specific linguistic situation are closely tied up with the country’s history. In 963, when Count Sigfrid acquired the remains of a Roman “castellum” called *Lucilinburhuc* (“small castle” in old Germanic, which later became *Lützenburg* and then *Luxembourg* in the 19th century), the territory was part of the Holy Roman Empire and High German was spoken. As the centuries passed and the country’s territory expanded successively, two linguistic zones emerged: a French-speaking zone where a Walloon dialect was spoken and a German-speaking zone where the Luxembourgish dialect was spoken. As far back as the 14th century, however, French and German (in their old forms) were being used as the written and administrative languages. The Luxembourg historian, Gilbert Trausch<sup>1</sup>, refers to “juxtaposed bilingualism” during that period, as the two languages were not spoken by the same people (except in the town of Luxembourg).

Under the impact of foreign domination (17-19th centuries), it was mainly French which gained ground in administrative terms, while Luxembourgish was used by all citizens in their daily lives. Upon independence in 1839 and following the partial break-up of the country’s territory, Luxembourg lay in the German-speaking zone. However, under the influence of politicians and notables and the effect of the industrialisation of the country, French established itself as the language of government, justice and politics. Moreover, in order to distinguish the country from the German Confederation and protect it against nationalist Germanising trends, French was made compulsory at school from primary level, alongside German. The status of Luxembourgish as the language of national identification subsequently grew stronger and stronger, in particular because it had been the language of the Resistance movement during the World War II Nazi occupation. This de facto situation was therefore confirmed by the 1984 law, which officially established Luxembourgish as the national language.

According to recent surveys, 77% of Luxembourgers indicate that Luxembourgish is their mother tongue and 99% claim to speak at least one other language in addition to their mother tongue. Luxembourgish is spoken by 45% of people in the capital, 54% in the rest of the central region and 68% in the north. 17% of residents speak more than one language with their children, 53% speak more than one language with their friends and 56% speak more than one language at work. On the labour market, Luxembourgish remains the most widely used language in overall terms, with variations depending on:

- the type of employer (81% of public sector workers, approximately 40% in the private sector),
- the sector (farmers use Luxembourgish almost exclusively and 75% of teaching personnel use it, while French is used most widely (46%) by unskilled workers),

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<sup>1</sup> TRAUSCH, Gilbert. *Histoire du Luxembourg*, Hatier, 1992.

- nationality (for 70% of Luxembourg nationals, Luxembourgish is the main language at work, while the main language used at work by foreign workers is French (54%))<sup>2</sup>.

Luxembourg's unique linguistic context means that the position in terms of the Charter and its implementation is very specific. This had to be taken into account in this initial periodic report, which therefore only covers the questions relevant to the context described.

## PART I

- 1. Please state the main legal act(s) whereby the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages has been implemented in your State. If you so desire, please mention the general considerations which have guided your country in the ratification process.**

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was approved in Luxembourg by a law of 8 April 2005.

As indicated in the introduction, the language situation in Luxembourg differs substantially from that in certain neighbouring countries which actually have several minority or regional languages. Nevertheless, Luxembourg recognises that languages are vital in terms of establishing identities and as tools for cultural expression, as well as communication, integration and social cohesion, and that steps must accordingly be taken to protect regional or minority languages and support the efforts made in this connection. Luxembourg therefore fully subscribes to the Charter's objectives.

Moreover, Luxembourg's ratification of the Charter reflects its desire actively to support the promotion of linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe. As Luxembourg is multilingual and multicultural, such diversity is part of daily life there and it therefore seems only natural that the country should promote it by supporting the principles enshrined both in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and in other instruments such as the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

In addition, in signing the Charter, Luxembourg gave a clear indication of its awareness of the situation regarding cross-border linguistic contacts and of its willingness to continue fostering existing interaction in this context.

- 2. Please indicate all regional or minority languages, as defined in paragraph a of Article 1 of the Charter, which exist on your State's territory. Indicate also the parts of the territory of your country where the speakers of such language(s) reside.**

Under Article 1 of the Charter, "regional or minority languages" means languages which are "traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population" and which are "different from the official language(s) of that State." Moreover, "it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants."

The definition of a regional or minority language under the article does not apply to French, German or Luxembourgish. Under the Languages Law of 24 February 1984, none of the

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<sup>2</sup> Special Eurobarometer 237 – Wave 63.4, *Europeans and Languages*, September 2005; Special Eurobarometer 243 – Wave 64.3, *Europeans and their languages*, February 2006; Klein, C., Genevois, A.S., Breulheid, S., *Vivre au Luxembourg n°21: La situation linguistique sur le marché du travail*, CEPS/INSTEAD – Population et Emploi, April 2006; *Le sondage Baleine*, Cahier RED, Sesopi – Centre intercommunautaire, 1998.

country's three languages may be regarded as having a lesser status than the others, as the law makes it very clear that legislative instruments are drafted in French and that, in contentious or non-contentious administrative matters and in judicial matters, French, German or Luxembourgish may be used. The latter is also designated the national language and is not therefore a language "traditionally used within a given territory of a State" by nationals of that State who "form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population." It is spoken throughout the country and is the mother tongue of almost the entire population. Luxembourgish is not therefore an official language "which is less widely used on the whole or part of its territory" than German or French, so Article 3 of the Charter does not apply either.

Lastly, as Article 1 of the Charter provides that regional or minority languages do not include "either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants," the languages spoken by the foreign population in Luxembourg cannot be regarded as such either.

In the light of the above, it should therefore be noted that the subsequent questions in the outline for periodical reports do not apply in Luxembourg's case.

## **PART II**

- 1. Please indicate what measures your State has taken to apply Article 7 of the Charter to the regional or minority languages referred to in paragraphs 2 and 4 of part I above, specifying the different levels of government responsible.**

With regard to Article 7 of the Charter and again taking account of the above explanations that there are no regional or minority languages in Luxembourg, a partial reply may nevertheless be given concerning para 1 (i): *"the promotion of appropriate types of transnational exchanges, in the fields covered by this Charter, for regional or minority languages used in identical or similar form in two or more States."*

It may be pointed out here that Luxembourg has always maintained good contacts with neighbouring countries, in particular by concluding and implementing cultural agreements which include literary and language exchanges and promotion measures. At inter-regional level, in particular, there is much interaction, for instance co-operation between libraries in the *Luxemburgensia* project (which includes the three languages of Luxembourgish, French and German), partnerships with cultural events such as the European Children's and Young People's Book Fair in Saarbrücken (Germany) and the Summer Book Fair in Metz (France), support for cross-border publications, the organisation of book readings by authors and other events in co-operation with cultural institutes and the holding of a regular Festival of Languages and Cultures.