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Minorities and Minority Languages in a Changing Europe

Conference on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Framework
Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European
Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France
Palais, room 1

18 – 19 June 2018

Panel session: Civil society and the Implementation of the Council of Europe's Conventions on Minority Rights
18 June 2018
Sabrina Rasom

Thank you very much for having the NPLD here to celebrate the 20 years of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

It is a matter of fact that Europe has quickly changed since 1998 from the political and social point of view and we have to adapt to this process.

This massive change however hasn't brought only negative consequences. For example, the development of new technologies gives the possibility to deliver and exchange news and contents in a sensibly faster, more schematic and easier way, thus giving means to structure and reinvent social, professional and working relationships. This can (and should) be applied also to the monitoring mechanisms of the Framework Convention and the Language Charter, that need revising, in order to be more effective, immediate and easily consulted.

To go in the details, the impression in reading the reports of the Language Charter, is that of redundant documents, of plenty of written pages from which the needed information can't be got immediately. Despite following the monitoring frames, each state uses a different approach, sometimes referring to the contents of previous reports and sometimes repeating unneeded prolix pieces of information. It is very expensive in terms of time, but not only, to consult these documents and to get a clear and real picture of the language situation. Technology can be used to work out new reporting procedures and to deliver them in shorter time.

For example, a monitoring software could be worked out, where parties insert their report data. These data can be consulted by the members of the Committee of Experts, who in an immediate way can keep in touch with states and directly suggest solutions and send recommendations. This system could also contain the general sociolinguistic situation of member states, that can be constantly updated, avoiding to confusedly repeat data in every periodical report.

More attention should be also addressed to the evaluation of the actions fulfilled by parties to respond to the recommendations of the Charter and of the Council of Europe. It is fundamental to check the results and the effectiveness of the projects, not only their fulfilment. Professor Colin William points out that we need to monitor outcomes, not only outputs, of projects, in order to be sure that they are successful and beneficial for the minority community.

Besides, in some reports, it is not clear in what extent states collaborate with the civil society, associations and NGOs in the process of reporting, and how they are empowered to collaborate. We strongly suggest to reconsider the role of these social subjects in the process of monitoring and implementing the Conventions, both at national and international level. This would be also very useful for a bottom up work in the process of ratification.

Furthermore, the monitoring process and the deriving recommendations are often seen by member states as an imposition by the Council of Europe, rather than as a way to support them in dealing with diversity. A stricter contact should be established between the Advisory Committee / Committee of Experts and member states, aiming at discussing the monitoring process and implementing it. More visits and workshops should be scheduled to discuss the linguistic situation of member states and to work out possible interventions.

We also suggest to work on communication. Concrete projects can be worked out, that explain the aims of these documents and give minority language citizens means of coming in contact with their rights. The Guidelines on the Language Charter are an example of how its

contents can be diffused at a domestic level. We suggest communication projects that involve local politicians of minority language regions, schools at different levels, media, associations. Short and impact videos could be created and diffused on social media and national or local TVs, where the contents of the conventions are promoted and explained on the interested territories, in the national language, but also in the minority languages.

Another point to be taken into account is the direct responsibility of minorities in the process of ratifying and monitoring. It is fundamental that local minority language governments be informed and involved in these processes.

To summarize, a revised way of reporting is needed, because time runs fast and the slow and obsolete bureaucratic machine, the lack of detailed and domestic communication, the several internal problems and diverse priorities of member states cause the loss of generations of speakers and this is an irreversible damage for minority languages.

Now to the importance of language and education policies. It would be fundamental that in the school programs of each state specific actions be devoted to language rights. Ad hoc materials at European level could be worked out, in order to offer a common framework of the importance of this issue, thus bringing up generations who are aware of the varied linguistic situation of Europe. This would contribute to form a responsible and integrated society, able to face multiculturalism and multilingualism in a positive and constructive way, without fear.

To conclude, new technologies connect territories and people in real time and give means to use all languages in all social fields. The virtual world offers infinite space and time. New technologies should be used in order to implement linguistic rights. European projects in the language and ICT field should address in the same way to majority and minority languages.

I close, stating the willingness of the NPLD to collaborate with the Council of Europe on the activities that will be carried out for the implementation of the Framework Convention and the Language Charter.

Thank you very much.

Sabrina Rasom – Vice-Chair of the Network to Promote Linguistic Diversity (NPLD)