

37th SESSION

The use of languages by local and regional authorities

Recommendation 441 (2019) ¹

1. The use of languages by local and regional authorities, and what they perceive to be undue restrictions on this use by central authorities, is an issue that has featured in several complaints that the Congress has received, in the course of its work in monitoring the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

2. Given the importance of language for culture, communication and identity, the growing diversity of Europe's societies, spurred on by increasing mobility, migration and freedom of movement, presents a growing challenge for local and regional authorities in the conduct of their affairs.

3. For more than twenty years, the Congress has been working to support and sustain regional and minority languages, to improve mutual understanding, based on the principles of democratic participation, cultural diversity and social cohesion. In its 2017-2020 priorities, it reaffirms its commitment to this work.

4. Mindful of Article 4, paragraph 2 of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, namely that local authorities should have the right to exercise their initiative on any matter not excluded from their competence, the Congress believes that territorial authorities should be free to decide what languages to make use of in the conduct of their affairs and the provision of public services, and that language should not serve as a barrier or be used as a weapon, but rather serve as a tool for communication.

5. The Congress believes that linguistic diversity is an asset for Europe's towns and regions, to be valued and enhanced for the benefit of all, and that this will contribute to greater social cohesion and mutual understanding between language minority speakers and speakers of the official language(s).

6. Article 10 of the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148) provides valuable guidance for the use of regional or minority languages by local and regional authorities in public life, which deserve the attention of all local and regional authorities, irrespective of whether their national governments are Parties to the Charter.

7. The Congress therefore,

a. bearing in mind:

i. the Congress reports and recommendations adopted in the course of its work to oversee the implantation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government;

¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 31 October 2019, 3rd sitting (see Document [CG37\(2019\)17](#), explanatory Memorandum), Rapporteur: Andrew DAWSON, United Kingdom (R, ECR)

- ii. the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148);
 - iii. the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No.157);
 - iv. Congress Recommendation 286 (2010) and Resolution 301 (2010) - Minority languages: an asset for regional development;
 - v. Congress Recommendation 410 (2017) and Resolution 424 (2017) on Regional and minority languages in Europe today;
- b.* Calls on member States of the Council of Europe to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, if they have not yet done so;
- c.* Calls on Member States of the Council of Europe to encourage and assist local and regional authorities to:
- i. undertake detailed language assessments of the language needs of their citizens and other persons who use their public services;
 - ii. provide services to all linguistic minorities to ensure adequate access to public services and democratic bodies, as far as is reasonably possible;
 - iii. take inspiration from Article 10 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, in the conduct of their business and the provision of public services and to apply these provisions to all linguistic minorities on their territories, as far as is reasonably possible;
 - iv. where possible provide specific earmarked financial resources for provision of services in languages other than the official languages;
 - v. provide language training and recruit officials competent in the relevant languages;
 - vi. provide information about political rights and electoral information in the relevant languages;
 - vii. provide information about public services, such as health, education, employment services, unemployment benefits, in the relevant languages;
 - viii. provide information on taxes in the relevant languages;
 - ix. provide information on sanctions (such as local transport fines) in the relevant languages;
 - x. provide interpretation services to facilitate the participation of minority language speakers in local and regional council meetings;
 - xi. provide warning and security signs in the relevant languages;
- d.* Calls on member States of the Council of Europe to encourage the States Parties to the two aforementioned treaties to:
- i. assess the gaps between their treaty obligations and the implementation in practice;
 - ii. avoid high numerical thresholds, ensure clear and consistent criteria;
 - iii. encourage the use of place-names in the relevant languages.