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Conference of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

“The use of languages by local and regional authorities”

31 May 2018, Grand Hotel Bálványos conference centre, Turia, Covasna County, Romania

Hosted by the Covasna County Council

*Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in English, French, German, Italian, Russian,
Romanian and Hungarian*

Draft programme

Many Council of Europe member states have important linguistic minorities. The rapid growth of immigrant communities is also transforming the demography of Europe's towns and cities. This language diversity raises a number of concerns with respect to local and regional democracy, illustrated by the fact that language issues have featured in several recent complaints received by the Congress with regard to the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Language barriers can prevent citizens from exercising their right to effectively and genuinely participate in the conduct of public affairs, including local council meetings. Multilingualism can also hinder citizens from using public services, in particular in social services. This goes against the principle of equal access to public services. How is the language diversity challenge addressed by local and regional authorities throughout Europe? How can it be addressed to the benefit of all concerned?

8h00 – 8h30 Registration of participants

8h30 – 9h15 Opening session

Moderated by **Róbert GRÜMAN**, Vice-president of Covasna County Council, Romania

Opening speeches by:

- **Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM**, President of the Congress
- **Hunor KELEMEN**, member of the Romanian Parliament, former Minister of Culture, President of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania
- **Sándor TAMÁS**, President of the Covasna County Council, Romania
- **Árpád András ANTAL**, mayor of Sfântu Gheorghe city, Romania

Introduction to the theme: **Andrew DAWSON**, Congress member, UK delegation, rapporteur on the use of languages by local and regional authorities

9h15 – 10h45 Session 1 – The use of languages in local and regional assemblies

An underlying principle of the European Charter of Local Self-Government is to ensure the capacity of local/regional elected representatives to participate in the activities and decisions of the local administration bodies (daily running of local bodies operations, meetings and decisions), and to carry out a meaningful representative function, even in a context of linguistic diversity. (see §5 of the Preamble and art. 7 of the Charter)

Moderated by **Amelie TARSCHYS INGRE**, Congress member, Swedish delegation

Contributions from:

- **Henrik HAMMAR**, Congress member, Swedish delegation
- **Luc MARTENS**, Congress member, Belgian delegation
- **Matija KOVAC**, Congress member, Serbian delegation

10h45 – 11h00 Coffee break

11h00 – 12h30 Session 2 – Interaction with local/regional administration and citizen participation: using languages to effectively participate in the conduct of public affairs

When citizens (e.g. in consultation or participatory budgeting processes) can express themselves or communicate with local and regional administrations in their own language (e.g. when applying for

official documents) they are able to understand the policies that affect them and to become actively involved in the local/regional civil life and promote a pluralistic and open society.

Moderated by **Kaisa-Rautio HELANDER**, Associate Professor of Sámi and Finnish languages at Sámi allaskuvla | Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Guovdageaidnu, Norway

Contributions from:

- **Paul BILBAO SARRIA**, Secretary-General of the Basque NGO Kontseilua, Spain
- **Prof. Dr René DE GROOT**, Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages of the Council of Europe
- **Enikő Katalin LACZIKÓ**, Secretary of State, Department for Interethnic Relations, Government of Romania
- **Meri HUWS**, Welsh Language Commissioner, United Kingdom

12h30 – 14h00 Lunch break

14h00 – 15h15 Session 3 –The role of minority toponyms in the linguistic landscape

The politics of naming places and buildings (public road signs, street names, public signs on government buildings) can be of immense importance with regard to cultural identity. Policies on the use of minority language place-names on official signage can be controversial and provoke strong reactions.

Moderated by **Andrew DAWSON**, Congress member, UK delegation, rapporteur on the use of languages by local and regional authorities

Contributions from:

- **Kaisa-Rautio HELANDER**, Associate Professor of Sámi and Finnish languages at Sámi allaskuvla | Sámi University of Applied Sciences in Guovdageaidnu, Norway
- **Luk VAN MENSEL**, FUNDP, Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures, University of Namur, Belgium
- **Heiko F. MARTEN**, Senior Researcher at Rēzekne Academy of Technologies, Latvia

15h15 – 16h30 Session 4 – Using languages to provide equal access to public services

In providing information and advice in the minority/regional language (e.g. through interpretation or translation), public healthcare, social services or public housing services, local and regional authorities can ensure that citizens from national minorities who are not fluent in the main/official language of the country can enjoy an effective equal access to public services.

Moderated by **Paul BILBAO SARRIA**, Secretary-General of the Basque NGO Kontseilua, Spain

Contributions from:

- **Lelia HUNZIKER**, Congress member, Swiss delegation, co-rapporteur on minority languages
- **Tony BUCHANAN**, Congress member, UK delegation
- **Prof. Gordana SILJANOVSKA-DAVKOVA**, Professor of Constitutional Law, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, "Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"

16h30 – 16h45 **Coffee break**

16h45 – 17h30 **Closing session**

- **Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM**, President of the Congress
- **Andrew DAWSON**, Congress member, UK delegation, rapporteur on the use of languages by local and regional authorities