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EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES

**Evaluation by the Committee of Experts
of the Implementation of the Recommendations for Immediate Action
contained in the Committee of Experts' fourth evaluation report on the
CZECH REPUBLIC**

Introduction

1. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (hereafter referred to as “the Charter”) is a treaty of the Council of Europe putting obligations on its States Parties to protect and promote the country’s traditional minority languages in all fields of public life: education, judicial authorities, administrative authorities and public services, media, cultural activities and facilities, economic and social life, and transfrontier exchanges. The Charter was ratified by the Czech Republic on 15 November 2006, entered into force on 1 March 2007 and applies to the following languages: Moravian Croatian (covered by Part II), German (Part II), Polish (Parts II and III), Romani (Part II) and Slovakian (Parts II and III).
2. The Committee of Experts monitors the implementation of the Charter. On the basis of periodical reports presented by each State Party, the Committee of Experts adopts evaluation reports in which it makes “**recommendations for immediate action**” and “further recommendations” on how to improve the protection and promotion of the regional or minority languages in the state concerned. Based on the evaluation report, the Committee of Ministers addresses additional recommendations to the State Party.
3. The State Party must present information only on the implementation of the **recommendations for immediate action** two and a half years after the due date of its periodical report.¹ The Committee of Experts then adopts an evaluation of the implementation of these recommendations. Two and a half years after the due date of the information, the State Party must present its next periodical report which shall contain comprehensive information about the implementation of all Charter undertakings and all recommendations.
4. The Czech Republic was expected to present **information on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action** contained in the Committee of Experts’ fourth evaluation report² by 1 March 2020; this information was submitted on 7 May 2020. This **evaluation of the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action** is based on the information received from the Czech Republic as well as from associations representing the German and Polish speakers pursuant to Article 16.2 of the Charter.³ As far as compliance of the Czech Republic with all its undertakings under the Charter is concerned, the Committee of Experts refers to its fourth evaluation report. The Committee of Experts will examine the implementation of all of the recommendations concerning all of the minority languages in the next evaluation report.
5. In the information on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action, the Czech authorities have, on their own initiative, also reported on the implementation of all of the recommendations made by the Committee of Ministers in the last monitoring cycle. The Committee of Experts considers this good practice and has used the additional information in its evaluation, where appropriate.
6. This evaluation was adopted by the Committee of Experts on 2 July 2020.

¹ In accordance with Committee of Ministers Decisions “Strengthening the monitoring mechanism of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages” (CM/Del/Dec(2018)1330/10.4e), para. 1.a

² CM(2019)73, https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=0900001680948771

³ In accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Committee of Experts (MIN-LANG(2019)7), Rule 17, paras. 1-6

Examination of the implementation by the Czech Republic of the recommendations for immediate action

1. Moravian Croatian

Recommendation for immediate action

Identify forms and means, including new media, for the revitalisation of Moravian Croatian

Implementation measures taken by the Czech authorities

7. In 2018, an association of Croatian speakers implemented the project “Documentation of the Oldest Speakers of Moravian Croatian”. The project aimed to preserve original Moravian Croatian vocabulary. For that purpose, interviews with speakers were recorded, rewritten, edited (in video, audio and text format) and published online. The Czech authorities funded this project through the grant scheme “Support for the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages”.

8. The Czech authorities are currently providing financial support to establish a Museum of Moravian Croats in the municipality of Jevišovka (South Moravia) by the end of 2020. The museum will be a cultural centre, present the history of the minority and may be used to teach Moravian Croatian. At present, Moravian Croatian can be learnt through an e-learning course which is promoted in publications of the minority.

9. The Government Council for National Minorities (official advisory body) holds a working group on broadcasting which deals with the use of minority languages on radio and television. In 2019, the working group launched a discussion on the possibility of supporting social networks and new media in minority languages using the state budget. The Government Council asked its secretariat to prepare the necessary steps to finance such media within existing or new programmes.

Evaluation by the Committee of Experts and further action needed

10. The Committee of Experts considers that the comprehensive documentation of Moravian Croatian is a prerequisite for its revitalisation. The project “Documentation of the Oldest Speakers of Moravian Croatian” has made a valuable contribution to the achievement of that objective. Its results could help to develop and implement a strategy on revitalising the use of Moravian Croatian in private and public life, including in education and media.

11. In education, concrete steps need to be taken to provide forms and means for the teaching of Moravian Croatian. The Committee of Experts notes that the Moravian Croatian e-learning course as well as the availability of premises at the Museum of Moravian Croats can support extra-curricular learning of this language. Extra-curricular teaching can serve as a basis to begin the introduction of teaching Moravian Croatian in mainstream pre-school and primary education.

12. New media offer a wide range of opportunities to support minority languages, including those with few speakers and limited infrastructure. The Committee of Experts therefore welcomes the fact that the Government Council for National Minorities supports the financing of new media in minority languages and looks forward to measures promoting Moravian Croatian in this framework.

13. The Committee of Experts commends the Czech authorities again for having established the dedicated grant scheme “Support for the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages”, which it considers a good example of a structured approach to the promotion of minority languages and a good framework of support for the revitalisation of Moravian Croatian.

2. German

Recommendation for immediate action

Take further steps to make teaching in or of German available as a minority language

Implementation measures taken by the Czech authorities

14. The Czech authorities state that German language education is not yet available in all of the regions where German is traditionally used and that, therefore, they have taken several steps “[i]n direct response to the” recommendations by the Committee of Ministers and the Committee of Experts as well as to proposals from the German speakers. Following an initiative by the Government Commissioner for Human Rights in 2019, the Office of the Government organised a meeting on teaching in German with the authorities of the cities of Cheb and Jablonec nad Nisou, local primary schools, the German speakers and the Ministry of Education. As a result of this meeting, the primary schools in both cities are considering gradually starting to teach subjects in German in 2020/2021. At present, steps are being taken to secure the necessary financial and other support for the plan, including possible support from Germany.

15. Furthermore, the Czech Republic considers extending the promotion of German under the Charter by applying its Part III to this language. According to the authorities, “[s]uch a step would provide a new framework for the development of the structured policy for the protection and promotion of German, including by making teaching in or of German available as a minority language and create favourable conditions for its use in public life”, as recommended by the Committee of Ministers in the last monitoring cycle. The Government Council for National Minorities has set up a working group to examine a list of Part III undertakings proposed by the German speakers on 18 July 2019. The working group is composed of representatives of competent ministries and the German speakers, as well as experts.

16. In statements submitted to the Committee of Experts, representatives of the German speakers stress the importance of both initiatives. In addition, they state that they intend, in co-operation with the national authorities, to also propose to the cities of Brno, Hlučín, Moravská Třebová and Opava to start teaching in German, based on the projects in Cheb and Jablonec nad Nisou.

Evaluation by the Committee of Experts and further action needed

17. The Committee of Experts welcomes the fact that the Czech authorities, in co-operation with the German speakers, have approached local authorities with a view to encouraging them to make teaching in German available. The projects of the primary schools in Cheb and Jablonec nad Nisou would, if implemented, make a valuable contribution to the development of German language education and be the result of a structured approach to the implementation of the Charter. Therefore, the Committee of Experts considers that the Czech authorities should, even if assistance by Germany is not secured, identify ways to support the schools in both cities in their implementation of these projects and encourage additional municipalities to implement such projects, in co-operation with the German speakers. Transfrontier exchanges with Germany in the field of education (e.g. application or conclusion of bilateral agreements, promotion of co-operation between regional or local authorities) would facilitate the national measures.

18. The Committee of Experts also welcomes the fact that, further to its invitation in the fourth evaluation report, the Czech authorities are examining the application of Part III of the Charter to German in co-operation with the speakers. In this context, the Committee of Experts concurs with the Czech authorities that such a step, notably the application of the relevant undertakings under Articles 8 and 14, would additionally support the implementation of the recommendation. The Committee of Experts therefore looks forward to the Czech authorities finalising the related procedure.

3. Polish

Recommendation for immediate action

Reconsider the thresholds for installing Polish place names and topographical signs in accordance with the Charter

Implementation measures taken by the Czech authorities

19. According to the Czech authorities, possible changes to the legal framework setting the threshold will be examined only once the results of the 2021 census are available. At present, the conditions for installing place name and other topographical signs in a language of a national minority continue to be defined by Law no. 128/2000 Coll. on municipalities (Section 29, paragraph 2): in a municipality inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities, the name of the municipality, its parts, streets and other public places as well as the designation of buildings of state bodies and territorial self-governing units shall also be given in the language of the national minority provided that at least 10% of the citizens of the municipality declared their affiliation with that national minority in the last two censuses. The installation of topographical signs in a minority language must be requested by the representatives of the relevant national minority through the Committee for National Minorities or in writing by an association of the national minority which has been active in the municipality for at least five years.

20. In 2018, the Czech authorities supported the municipalities of Jablunkov/Jabłonków and Vendryně/Wędrynia in installing bilingual topographic signage. These measures were financed through the grant scheme "Support for the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages".

21. In a statement submitted to the Committee of Experts, representatives of the Polish speakers point out that they are not aware of systemic activities by the national authorities promoting the use of place names in Polish in municipalities where the 10% threshold is not reached. According to the Polish speakers, the way in which data on ethnic affiliation is collected in censuses makes it more difficult to reach the 10% threshold. Firstly, it is not mandatory to indicate if one belongs to a national minority and a number of those belonging to the Polish minority have not done so. In addition, one is allowed to indicate two affiliations. In municipalities where the 10% threshold is met, the local authorities, according to the statement, follow no consistent methodology as to how many, and which, Polish place names are used. In conclusion, the Polish speakers advocate a lowering of the 10% threshold.

Evaluation by the Committee of Experts and further action needed

22. The Committee of Experts welcomes the fact that the Czech authorities have financially supported municipalities in installing bilingual topographic signage, which were relevant practical steps in the context of the recommendation.

23. However, the Committee of Experts regrets that, so far, no steps have been taken towards the lowering of the 10% threshold. This threshold still hampers the continuous application of the Charter, especially in municipalities where the number of speakers fell under 10% according to the last censuses but can still be considered sufficient for the application of the Charter. Against this background, the Committee of Experts refers to its fourth evaluation report where the authorities were again encouraged to apply the Charter where there is a demand, irrespective of thresholds.

24. More generally, the Committee of Experts reiterates that traditional place names in minority languages are an expression of the local cultural heritage of a municipality which can be appreciated by the entire population, irrespective of ethnic affiliations. Therefore, the Czech authorities could consider the promotion of the use of place names in minority languages irrespective of thresholds and census results, for example on tourist signs.

4. Romani

Recommendation for immediate action

Examine, in co-operation with the speakers, ways of introducing Romani into mainstream education

Implementation measures taken by the Czech authorities

25. As far as primary education is concerned, the Czech authorities state that the Florián Bayer Primary School in Kopřivnice remains the only primary school in the Czech Republic where Romani is taught. At this school, Romani is taught as a part of the Multicultural Education course. According to the authorities, the low interest of Roma parents and a lack of teachers of Romani are obstacles to extending teaching of Romani to additional primary schools. In addition, Romani and Roma studies are taught at the Secondary School of Management and Law in Jihlava and at the Secondary Medical School in Český Krumlov. It is possible to pass the state exam in Romani at the Language School in Prague, but the interest in it is decreasing.

26. As in previous years, teaching of Romani is also offered by several universities: Roma Studies and Integration of Roma in Special Education (both at Charles University Prague), Romani (Masaryk University Brno), Roma studies and Romani (Pardubice University) and Fundamentals of Romological Studies (Ostrava University).

27. As far as co-operation with the speakers is concerned, the Czech authorities state that Roma associations support teaching of Romani. For example, the organisations “Nová škola, o.p.s.”, “Amaro suno - feder dživipen, z.s.” and “KHER, z.s.” teach Romani. KHER has also organised seminars for teachers and other pedagogical staff at Czech schools to support awareness about Romani.

Evaluation by the Committee of Experts and further action needed

28. The Czech authorities acknowledge that “the support of systematic teaching of Romani is still insufficient”. Romani continues to be taught on a very limited scale in mainstream primary and secondary education, and it is not used in pre-school. The situation is better in higher education as Romani can be studied at several universities.

29. In general, the Czech authorities co-operate closely with representatives of the Romani speakers concerning the promotion of Romani. However, the authorities have not reported about specific steps taken to examine, with the representatives of the speakers, how the structural obstacles to the extension of Romani-language education (low interest of Roma, lack of teachers of Romani) could be overcome.

30. Against this background, the Committee of Experts refers to a *further recommendation* it made in the fourth evaluation report, namely that the Czech authorities should “[c]ontinue taking measures to raise awareness of the benefits of promoting Romani within the Roma community”. The Committee of Experts is aware that many Roma parents are of the view that speaking Romani in the family is sufficient to master this language and prefer their children to prioritise learning Czech at school. Nevertheless, if the teaching of Romani were to actually be offered in relevant municipalities and parents’ awareness raised as to the strong advantages for children in acquiring full literacy of their mother tongue, this attitude would change. Consequently, the Committee of Experts considers that the Czech authorities should intensify their dialogue with representatives of the Romani speakers with a view to developing a strategy on introducing Romani in pre-school education and extending its teaching in mainstream primary and secondary education. The Committee of Experts notes that new social media in Romani could contribute to raising the prestige of this language among younger people and increasing their interest in Romani language education.

Communication to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

The Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, while acknowledging the efforts the Czech authorities have undertaken to comply with their undertakings under the Charter, has in its fourth evaluation report (CM(2019)73) made “recommendations for immediate action” and “further recommendations” on how to improve the protection and promotion of the regional or minority languages in the Czech Republic.

In accordance with the Committee of Ministers Decisions of 28 November 2018 (CM/Del/Dec(2018)1330/10.4e), the Czech Republic had to present information on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action, which contain the priority measures that should be taken by the State Party. The Czech Republic presented this information on 7 May 2020. In the present evaluation, the Committee of Experts has examined the implementation of these recommendations.

In accordance with its Rules of Procedure, the Committee of Experts invites the Committee of Ministers to:

1. take note of the evaluation made by the Committee of Experts of the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action by the Czech Republic and invite the Czech authorities to disseminate it to the competent national authorities and relevant stakeholders;
2. reiterate its Recommendation CM/RecChL(2019)3 and invite the Czech authorities to present their next periodical report by 1 March 2023 in the required format.