

33rd SESSION**Regional and minority languages in Europe today**Resolution 424 (2017)¹

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (hereafter “the Congress”), recognising the close relation between language and culture and in line with Council of Europe priorities, has long strived to support and sustain historical regional and minority languages as a mean to promote and improve Europe’s cultural wealth and traditions and linguistic diversity, and improve mutual understanding, based on the principles of democratic participation, cultural diversity and social cohesion.
2. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148), opened to signature in 1992, and which came into force in 1998, has been serving since then as the only legally binding European instrument specifically drawn up to protect and promote Europe’s historical regional and minority languages, which are defined as traditionally used within a State by nationals who form a group numerically smaller than the overall population.
3. Regrettably, as of 2017, only 25 European States have ratified the Charter, and an additional eight European States have signed it, without ratification. This means that 14 European States neither ratified, nor signed the Charter.
4. While the States themselves remain the parties to the Charter, local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play in its effective implementation. This allows regional authorities in States which have not yet signed nor ratified the Charter a margin of manoeuvre for spontaneous implementations of the principles under the Charter.
5. Reaffirming the grounding principles of the Charter that still hold true, both observations – collected during the past decades of the existence of the Charter, including best practices, challenges and tensions – and new developments in society call for a renewal of the methods used for the Charter’s implementation without prejudice to the continuity of its fundamental principles and provisions.
6. Observations and complaints collected from 1998 – when the Charter entered in force – show that ratification of the Charter by any State is not a warrant or proof of the effective protection of the historical regional or minority languages without an effective and consistent implementation in daily practice. Also, in some cases, some setbacks have occurred in the level of the protection of the regional or minority language. This highlights the importance of the different types of stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Charter. Hence the role of the regional and local authorities is essential.
7. An effective implementation of the provisions therefore requires taking note of the dramatic social and technical changes digitalisation has brought about. Bearing this in mind, ten years after its Recommendation on language education on regional or minority languages, the Congress has undertaken to look at the contemporary application of the Charter in light of the new developments, in order to discuss local and regional authorities’ renewed possibilities for action in this regard.

¹ Discussed and approved by the Chamber of Regions on 19 October 2017, and adopted by the Congress on 20 October 2017, 3rd sitting (see Document [CPR33\(2017\)02](#), explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Lelia HUNZIKER, Switzerland (L, SOC) and Anna MAGYAR, Hungary (R, EPP-CCE).

8. The post-2008 economic context has been clearly characterised by a shift in how policies supporting regional or minority languages are perceived. This has resulted in important cuts in education and services provided in minority languages. Although national authorities play a major role in these austerity policies (local and regional authorities rarely receive clearly identified budgets from the national level for the implementation of regional or minority languages), local and regional authorities should also be reminded of the major benefits that stem from protecting and nurturing cultural diversity, including linguistic diversity. Offering attractive conditions to regional and minority languages, while generally costing little, can act as a bulwark against work force or brain drain, by increasing the willingness to stay in the regions concerned. Furthermore, empirical evidence shows that multilingual regions offer higher incomes to both multilingual individuals and the region as a whole. Last but not least, higher levels of individual multilingual skills have been shown to boost creativity factors.

9. Local and regional authorities being front-line providers of public services, they should co-ordinate their action with their national authorities in order to adequately adapt the implementation of the Charter. Local and regional authorities should be fully involved and take steps to gain mandatory responsibilities and explicit entitlement from the governance level, in order to implement the processes which are necessary to their daily practice. Similarly, local and regional authorities need to be fully involved and have clear entitlement in order to successfully take into account the changes taking place due to digitalisation in the *modus operandi* of almost all sectors in society. These new developments provide both challenges and opportunities for protecting and nurturing Europe's cultural wealth and traditions, including linguistic diversity. Without withholding traditional support, local and regional public policies should take into account the digital sector as a means of supporting, in so far as possible, the use of regional or minority languages in education, judicial and administrative settings, in the media, in cultural activities, economic and social life, and transfrontier exchanges.

10. In light of the above, the Congress:

a. bearing in mind the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148), Congress Recommendation 222(2007) on "Language education in regional or minority languages", Recommendation 1773(2006) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe entitled the "2003 guidelines on the use of minority languages in the broadcast media and the Council of Europe standards: need to enhance co-operation and synergy with the OSCE", Congress Recommendation 364(2014) on The role of regional media as a tool for building participatory democracy, Congress Resolution 282(2009) on The digital divide and e-inclusion in the regions and Congress Recommendation 173(2005) on Regional media and transfrontier co-operation;

b. considering that:

i. member States of the Council of Europe should be guided by the principle that diversity is not only a fact, but an enriching element of society and that the protection of historical regional or minority languages constitutes the firmest protection of said diversity;

ii. in conformity with the ethos and provisions of the Charter which is characterised by an intercultural and multilingual approach, each category of regional or minority languages (official or not) must have its proper place in a democratic, inclusive society;

iii. while the States are the contractual parties, local and regional authorities have a crucial role to play in the practical implementation of the Charter;

c. invites local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe member States to:

i. call on their respective national authorities to sign and ratify the Charter, if they have not yet done so;

ii. call on their respective national authorities to guarantee local authorities explicit entitlement, full involvement and mandatory responsibilities, with clearly identified budgets in order to implement the processes necessary for daily practice;

iii. call on their respective national authorities to refrain from bringing the weight of austerity measures to bear on regional or minority language policies, since their impact on public spending has been proven to be minor;

iv. call on their respective national authorities to refrain from barring local and regional authorities from taking positive action within their competences for the promotion of regional or minority languages, and also, from short-sighted interpretation of the protection of these languages, including the misconception that all protective measures are forbidden which are not specified separately and explicitly in law;

v. act in favour of the safeguarding of historical regional or minority languages, by facilitating and encouraging their use in speech and writing, in public and private life, as a key resource that needs to be nurtured because they are a benefit to the regional and local economy, creativity, vibrancy and well-being;

vi. meet the need for effective co-operation and interaction between local, regional and national governments regarding the protection and promotion of historical regional or minority languages, noting that a lack of clear division of administrative powers in relation to language issues risks hindering good practice implementation at the regional level;

vii. take measures, where and when possible, to consolidate and develop regional or minority language teaching and education on these languages in their regions, by offering attractive conditions (preferably via identified budgets), thereby contributing to the creation of a European space where regional or minority language education is systematically provided in a coherent fashion;

viii. ensure, when and where possible, that regional or minority language speakers are able to benefit from the new forms of distance-learning that exist by developing new applications that support the use of these languages and secure service provision in these languages, also in the digital realm, including by dismantling new digital borders;

ix. secure access to locally or regionally provided public services and procedures in regional or minority languages, including but not limited to health care and social services, the ability of public authorities to provide digital services in regional or minority languages being essential, given the rapid development of such services in society at large;

x. encourage and support public authorities at national, regional and local level to consult and co-operate with representatives of regional or minority language speakers in developing and implementing their language policies and language services;

xi. improve when pertinent, regional and cross-border co-operation in order to provide access to services using regional or minority languages in kin-States.

11. The Congress invites local and regional authorities of member States which have not yet signed and ratified the Charter, to adopt local or regional versions of it containing provisions which match their competences, and to make use of the Charter and of the monitoring practice of the Council of Europe Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Regional or Minority Languages in Europe as a body of best practices and practical examples on how to arrange conditions where historical regional or minority languages are protected and promoted.