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**EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES**

**Information Document**  
**on the implementation of the**  
**Recommendations for Immediate Action**  
**based on the 8th monitoring cycle**

**Submitted by Switzerland**



# Interim report by Switzerland on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action in the 8th evaluation report of the Committee of Ministers

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Date:

September 2023

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## I. Origin

Under the 2018 reform to strengthen the monitoring mechanism of the European Charter for Minority or Regional Languages, in addition to submitting a full periodic report on the application of the Charter to the Council of Europe every five years, States Parties must also provide an update on the implementation of the recommendations for immediate action two and a half years later.

This is Switzerland's first interim report. It deals solely with the four recommendations for immediate action communicated by the Committee of Ministers in December 2022.<sup>1</sup> These recommendations are based on the periodic report submitted in 2021<sup>2</sup> and the visit of the delegation of the Charter's Committee of Experts to Switzerland in 2022.

## II. Procedure

The Federal Office of Culture (FOC) acts on behalf of the Confederation as the co-ordinating body for reporting under the monitoring mechanism of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The authorities and minority language groups affected by the recommendations for immediate action are consulted at every stage: from establishing the problem and identifying possible solutions to describing the measures taken.

The call for input for this interim report ran from June to mid-July 2023. To help the relevant authorities and minority language groups prepare their responses, the FOC provided a series of targeted questions.

Depending on the nature of the recommendations for immediate action, various authorities including the Cantons of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni, Fribourg/Freiburg, Jura, Neuchâtel, Valais/Wallis, Vaud and Ticino and the municipality of Murten/Morat were asked to respond to this call for input. The cantons of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni, Bern/Berne and Fribourg/Freiburg and the municipality of Murten/Morat replied. The following minority language groups were consulted and all replied:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/rev-min-lang-2022-8-8th-evrep-switzerland-25-7-22-final-public-en/1680a86b8f>

<sup>2</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/minlang-2021-pr5-switzerland-fr-8th-periodical-report/1680a407ce>

Lia Rumantscha, Pro Grigioni Italiano, Forum du Bilinguisme and Bund der angestammten deutschsprachigen Minderheiten in der Schweiz (BADEM).

Following the consultation, the FOC drew up this report for submission to the Council of Europe in September 2023.

The report is in three parts. The first part contains feedback from the authorities to whom the recommendations for immediate action were addressed. The second part presents the views of the minority language groups that were consulted in accordance with the Charter. The third part summarises the implications for the 9th evaluation report on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Switzerland.

### III. Feedback from the cantonal and municipal authority consultation exercise

Recommendations 1 and 2 to the Canton of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni on the use of Italian and Romansh in economic and school life:

- a. Take additional measures promoting the use of Italian – and Romansh – in economic and social life, including in the public sector.

*In general – applies to both Romansh and Italian minority languages*

The implementation of the Language Promotion Code for the cantonal administration of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni, submitted for consultation in the second quarter of 2023, is planned for January 2024. In line with the decision of the Grand Council (cantonal parliament), work is under way to revise part of the cantonal ordinance on languages to ensure that all the canton's official languages are represented on the Grand Council's standing committees and that the administration proposes a multilingual website. This should be implemented by the spring of 2024.

As of August 2023, the Grand Council offers simultaneous interpretation into German, Romansh and Italian. The necessary work to adapt the parliament building for this purpose was carried out in the summer of 2023.

The promotion of trilingualism among various economic stakeholders providing public services or in public-facing roles – such as the Cantonal Bank, the Rhaetian Railway, the Cantonal Hospital, those in the tourism sector, etc. – includes providing advice on best practice and creating and maintaining networks.

Measures are also being taken in the field of vocational training. On the basis of the Cantonal Government's decision of 2 February 2021 (Prot. No. 85/2021), the Office for Vocational Training worked with vocational schools to set performance and quality targets for 2023, particularly with regard to languages. This mainly includes measures to support language teaching (first and second foreign languages) and to promote linguistic exchanges.

*For Italian in particular*

The canton's Italian-speaking regions met at the *Giornate grigionitaliane* in Maloja/Maloggia in August 2023.

*Promotion of the Italian-language media in Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni*

In accordance with the decision of the Grand Council, two reports were commissioned, the first describing the current situation and needs and the second proposing measures. The consultation phase is now under way.

*For Romansh in particular*

The translation and proofreading services provided to municipalities by Lia Rumantscha, an organisation that works to preserve Romansh with the support of the Swiss Confederation and the Canton of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni, will also be made available to SMEs free of charge through the *Rumantsch\*a - adina e dapertut* scheme. The exact terms and conditions are still to be worked out.

The Confederation and the Canton have asked Lia Rumantscha to develop a *Strategia digitala rumantscha* as part of its service contract. The aim is to identify and implement key digital projects, while

pooling technical and financial resources and avoiding duplication.

Under the current service contract, the Confederation and the canton have entrusted Lia Rumantscha with the task of driving forward the relevant planning and co-ordination work.

Recommendations 1 and 2 to the Canton of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni on the use of Italian and Romansh in economic and school life:

- b. Clarify to what extent the school inspectorate of the Canton of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni carries out the tasks foreseen by Article 8.1.i, i.e. “to set up a supervisory body or bodies responsible for monitoring the measures taken and progress achieved in establishing or developing the teaching of regional or minority languages [...]”,<sup>3</sup> and, if needed, extend its mandate accordingly.

In the Canton of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni, the Office for Multilingualism, which is part of the Department of Education, Culture and Environmental Protection, works to strengthen trilingualism as a hallmark of the canton. One of its main tasks is to make the departments and services (including the School Inspectorate of the Office for Compulsory Education and Sport) aware of the legal provisions to be implemented. It is also responsible for advising and raising awareness among those outside the administration on issues relating to the application of the Language Act. The Delegate for multilingualism works closely with the Cantonal Office for Language Promotion.

In accordance with cantonal legislation, the School Inspectorate of the Office for Compulsory Education and Sport is responsible for:

- a) checking that school authorities implement and comply with cantonal regulations and quality standards;
- b) periodically evaluating state schools;
- c) advising teachers, school management and local education authorities on teaching, school planning, in-service training and conflict management.

As part of its supervisory role, the School Inspectorate regularly checks that schools comply with the timetable rules and thus with the rules on teaching in different languages, including Romansh and Italian. According to its guidelines, the School Inspectorate is also responsible for approving special timetable arrangements for communities situated on language borders.

As the digital transformation also has an impact on education, society and the economy and as major new developments may also have a multiplier effect for minority languages, the Canton of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni would like the following measures to be included in this report for the compulsory school sector, particularly in connection with the introduction of the Canton’s current regional curriculum (Lehrplan 21):

- a general improvement in primary school equipment (devices, software and connectivity) in all the language regions of the canton of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni;
- the introduction of a “media and information technology” module as part of the compulsory curriculum from primary school onwards;
- improved cantonal data on the state of digitisation in compulsory education thanks to regular, clearly defined assessments by the authorities.

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<sup>3</sup> [Text of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages](#)

Recommendation 3 to the municipality of Murten/Morat and the Canton of Fribourg/Freiburg concerning French:

- a. Adopt cantonal and/or local legislation on the use of French in public life in the municipality of Murten/Morat (Canton of Fribourg/Freiburg).

The **municipality of Murten/Morat** (approx. 9 000 inhabitants) sees bilingualism as a good way of promoting community interaction and mutual understanding. Efforts are primarily focused on each community learning the other's language. No legislation is currently being drafted or planned.

Parents are free to choose whether their children are taught in French or in German, as both schools are located in the same building, thereby breaking down language barriers.

For its part, the **Canton of Fribourg/Freiburg**, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity, considers that the municipality fulfils its duties conscientiously in its areas of competence, with due respect for each of the official languages.

Recommendation 3 to the municipality of Murten/Morat and the Canton of Fribourg/Freiburg concerning French:

- b. Prepare, in the context of the implementation of the "Regulation on support of initiatives promoting bilingualism", a strategy on the promotion of French in Murten/Morat.

Although the **municipality of Murten/Morat** does not have a specific strategy to support the French language, measures to promote bilingualism are an integral part of its activities. Services for French speakers are constantly being developed and implemented. Recently, a language café was organised where people can exchange their language skills and learn languages themselves. From August 2023, the municipality will run a French early learning scheme and other projects are in the pipeline.

In its current form, the Regulation on support for initiatives to promote bilingualism does not lend itself to the development of a strategy for a given region. The Murten/Morat region regularly submits applications, particularly in connection with the Festival of Lights, in response to the call for projects in this respect issued by the **Canton of Fribourg/Freiburg**. At least five projects by and for the municipality of Murten/Morat have received support since 2016.

Recommendation 4 to cantons on municipalities where German is a non-official language traditionally used by a significant minority or the majority, concerning German:

- a. Adopt cantonal and/or local legislation on the use of German in public life in the municipalities where German is a non-official minority or majority language.

At its winter 2022 session, the Grand Council of the **Canton of Bern/Berne** considered motion No. 063-2022 on "A law and more financial support for the promotion of bilingualism, now!" tabled by the member for the Bernese Jura, Sandra Roulet Romy (Malleray, Socialist Party), and partly adopted it in the form of a postulate. The Executive Council has been asked to examine whether, in addition to the legislation on the special status of the Bernese Jura and on the French-speaking minority in the administrative district of Biel/Bienne, a bill or decree should be drawn up, measures taken or a report drafted concerning bilingualism throughout the canton. This process must be completed within two years, i.e. by 31 December 2024, and work is currently under way.

The State Chancellery of the Canton of Bern/Berne is not aware of any initiatives at municipal level. At its spring session in 2023, the Grand Council also took note of the cantonal government's response to two parliamentary interpellations calling for greater consideration to be given to the German language in the Bernese Jura and to the French language in the German-speaking part of the Canton of Bern/Berne. The Executive Council considers that these issues are now closed.

Recommendation 4 to cantons on municipalities where German is a non-official language traditionally used by a significant minority or the majority, concerning German:

- b. Make available German language education from pre-school to secondary levels for those municipalities where German is a non-official minority or majority language.

In the **Canton of Bern/Berne**, the local authority provides free compulsory schooling to all children, in accordance with the cantonal law on compulsory schooling. Schools follow the territorial distribution of languages, with the bilingual (French/German) municipalities of Biel/Bienne and Leubringen/Évilard as special cases. Families can choose between French and German schooling at all levels and bilingual education is available almost everywhere.

Beyond these two bilingual municipalities, parents must send their children to the municipal schools if they want them to benefit from free compulsory state education. However, they may also choose to enrol their children in an accredited private school providing education in the language of their choice, provided that they pay for tuition, transport and, if necessary, maintenance. Finally, parents may request permission from the Inspectorate for home education (home schooling), which may be provided in German in the Bernese Jura. At present, 16 children are being home-schooled in German in that region.

In recent decades, the German-language state schools that once existed in the Bernese Jura, the French-speaking part of the Canton of Bern/Berne, have closed one by one due to low enrolment. The decisions to shut down the schools were taken when there were no longer enough children to meet the minimum number required by cantonal law and the running costs had become disproportionately high for the municipality concerned. In 2019, the municipality of La Scheulte/Schelten (39 inhabitants in 2020), which was no longer able to provide schooling due to an insufficient number of pupils in its catchment area, opted for a pragmatic solution by sending its children to the neighbouring Canton of Solothurn (SO), to Mümliswil-Ramiswil for primary school and to Balsthal for secondary school, for teaching in German. This inter-cantonal arrangement was introduced thanks to the Regional Schools Agreement on the reciprocal admission of pupils and payment of school fees (RSA 2009), to which both the Cantons of Bern/Berne and Solothurn are signatories.

It is still possible for schools in the Canton of Bern/Berne, including the Bernese Jura, to offer immersion education under the general guidelines of the relevant regional curriculum (*Plan d'études romand*, PER). To date, no municipality has introduced such a system, nor has the Department of Education of the Canton of Bern/Berne received a specific request to do so. Similarly, the Bernese Jura School Inspectorate has not had to deal with any requests for transfers to other municipalities in order to have children taught in German.

Lastly, there are currently no specifically German-speaking or bilingual nurseries in the Bernese Jura, nor has permission been sought to open any in the region. The Bernese Jura School Inspectorate is not aware of any applications to set up a German-language all-day school (*Tagesschule*).

In 2009, the **Canton of Fribourg/Freiburg** adopted a nine-point language policy to promote the learning of foreign and migrant languages. On 11 November 2021, the Department of Education and Cultural Affairs (DFAC) submitted a report to the State Council on the Cantonal Language Learning Plan, taking stock of the achievements since 2009. It concluded that the nine proposals had been implemented, in particular by means of updated teaching methods, and that the previous guidelines had to be replaced by new instructions for learning the partner language (first foreign language, French or German). The emphasis is on promoting immersion, which includes various forms of exchanges between schools and immersion teaching.

The recently adopted Law on Compulsory Schooling (2014) and the Regulations on the Law on Compulsory Schooling (2016) came into force in January 2023, reaffirming the importance of language teaching – in particular of the partner language – whether through bilingual and immersion teaching or linguistic exchanges.

With regard to special authorisations to attend a school outside the district for linguistic reasons, areas that include an official French-speaking municipality and an official German-speaking municipality or a

bilingual municipality must provide free state education in both languages. For the 2022/23 school year, the Service for compulsory education in French (SEnOF) processed 54 requests to change school district on linguistic grounds (families living in French-speaking municipalities wishing to send their children to a German-speaking school). During the same period, the Service for compulsory education in German (DOA) handled seven requests from families living in German-speaking municipalities who wanted to enrol their children in French-speaking schools.

As regards pre-school institutions (early childhood facilities), no applications for authorisation to open a bilingual nursery have been submitted to date, although there is a bilingual nursery (Crèche Réformée/ Reformierte Krippe) in the bilingual city of Fribourg/Freiburg.

#### **IV. Consultation of minority language group associations in accordance with Articles 6 and 7 (4) of the Charter**

Recommendations 1 and 2 to the Canton of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni on the use of Italian in economic and school life

**Pro Grigioni Italiano (PGI)** acknowledges the efforts made by the cantonal authorities to raise awareness among the main economic stakeholders providing public services, but recommends that the list of such stakeholders be reviewed and expanded. PGI would very much like to see transparent communication and information on the measures taken by these companies to promote trilingualism.

While the Canton recognises that more needs to be done regarding the use of Italian on the websites of public service companies, the Cantonal Bank and the Cantonal Hospital, as well as in access to emergency services, PGI would like to see a special and targeted effort in the healthcare sector, particularly at the Cantonal Hospital. Minority language speakers want to be able to communicate in Italian with the emergency services, to receive information, forms and certificates in Italian for the Cantonal Hospital service and to be able to speak Italian with doctors at the Cantonal Hospital (possibly with the help of specialised interpreters).

On the other hand, PGI confirms that it has never received any reports (positive or negative) from its members or other residents of the canton's Italian-speaking municipalities on the quality of Italian language teaching in schools. However, the organisation would like to see more transparency and information about the measures taken and how they are evaluated.

**Lia Rumantscha (LR)** points out that digital transformation offers additional opportunities to promote the use of Romansh in many areas of everyday life. As part of the Message for the Promotion of Culture for 2021-2024, the FOC has introduced support for projects that facilitate access to Romansh and contribute to its use and preservation. In particular, it encourages digital projects that lead to open source and non-profit formats, data and services. LR believes that supporting digital transformation should be part of a broader core mandate for the promotion of Romansh.

LR would also like to see greater use made of the Romansh language, which has semi-official status. The aim is to counteract the marginalisation of Romansh in the federal administration and in the public sector as a result of the consistent use of the languages with full official status (French, German and Italian) and, in many cases, English. Although Romansh is one of the four national languages, it is used only in very specific cases. The use of Romansh in the public sphere has great potential. In this respect, uniform usage guidelines need to be redefined and it should be the preferred language for information aimed at the general public in the Romansh region.

As far as compulsory schooling is concerned, LR calls on the municipalities to fulfil their obligations with regard to teaching in Romansh, particularly in view of the current shortage of teachers.

Recommendation 3 to the Canton of Fribourg/Freiburg and the municipality of Murten/Morat concerning French

Before any new laws or regulations are adopted, the **Forum for Bilingualism** strongly recommends that a state of the art report be drawn up on the linguistic practices and needs of the various municipalities concerned. To this end, it has developed a Bilingualism Barometer (*Baromètre du bilinguisme®*) in order to evaluate the measures taken and to tailor them as closely as possible to the needs of the population in those various communities, whether French- or German-speaking under the territorial principle.

The Forum du bilinguisme is ready to work with the cantonal authorities to open an office in Fribourg/Freiburg. This would enable the Biel/Bienne-based foundation to implement the key practical solutions it has developed and to ensure that the issue of language is consistently taken into account in municipal and cantonal administration.

Recommendation 4 to cantons on municipalities where German is a non-official language traditionally used by a significant minority or the majority

The **Bund der angestammten deutschsprachigen Minderheiten in der Schweiz (BADEM)** considers that the cantons concerned by Recommendation 4 have not taken any legislative or educational initiatives. As far as education is concerned, BADAM would like to emphasise that it is a question of German as a language of instruction and not only of the teaching of German as a foreign language.

BADEM has high expectations of the future cantonal law on languages in the Canton of Fribourg/Freiburg, which is currently in the drafting stage. In the Canton of Bern/Berne, BADEM deplores the fact that in the Bernese Jura, the regional administration (Bernese Jura administrative district) generally only uses French (as provided for in the Constitution of the Canton of Bern/Berne). Although letters may be sent to the local authorities in German, they usually only reply in French. BADEM demands that the offices of the Bernese Jura administrative district respond in German to requests from German-speakers throughout the region and that they provide services in German in German-speaking municipalities. In the medium term, it would like to see the old German place names restored.

With regard to the Canton of Ticino, BADEM is pleased to note that in 2018, the municipal assembly of Bosco Gurin adopted the "Gurin Charter", which has been ratified by the cantonal authorities and is being implemented as far as possible. The needs of those who speak "Ggurijartitsch" (Gurin's local Swiss-German dialect) and of the Gurin community as a whole have been met so far. BADEM hopes that the provisions of the Charter will be maintained in the event of a merger with another municipality and that Gurin's culture, language and needs will continue to be taken into account in the future. It welcomes the fact that addresses in the village will soon be changed to Ggurijartitsch. Correspondence with the Canton has always been in Italian.

As regards education, BADEM is generally dissatisfied with the measures taken by the cantons. It would like the Canton of Ticino to speed up the implementation of the solution outlined in the 8th report by hiring qualified staff, irrespective of the planned merger of municipalities, as the intermunicipal school association already exists. In the Canton of Fribourg/Freiburg, BADEM calls for a unified approach to schooling and the coverage of related costs. In Bern/Berne, BADEM is not satisfied with the practical solutions currently being implemented. It is calling for a canton-wide push for bilingual education.



## **V. Conclusions and implications for the 9th evaluation report on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Switzerland**

The FOC has endeavoured to reflect as faithfully as possible the views it received. The preparation of the report and the consultation process provided an opportunity for stakeholder dialogue and highlighted a number of topical issues and ongoing considerations.

Improving the status of minority languages in economic and social life is a common goal for all stakeholders, but its implementation is complex and obviously an ongoing task.

The 9th evaluation report on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in Switzerland will provide an opportunity to see the first effects of the changes being made in the Canton of Graubünden/Grischun/Grigioni, particularly in the area of vocational training, and to take stock of the various reports and political processes under way in the Cantons of Bern/Berne and Fribourg/Freiburg.

The FOC would like to thank the cantonal and municipal authorities and the organisations representing the minority language groups for their comprehensive and detailed responses, without which this report would not have been possible.