

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 453 (2019)¹ The use of languages by local and regional authorities

1. One of the features of the growing diversity of Europe's towns and regions is an increasing linguistic diversity. As a result, Europe's local and regional authorities find themselves confronted with more and more language issues in the conduct of their affairs and the provision of public services.

2. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe itself has language issues regularly brought to its attention, as the body entrusted with assessing the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122). More and more local authorities are asserting the right to make and apply their own decisions and policies on language, according to their own needs, and as a result find themselves in disagreement with higher-level authorities.

3. This has prompted the Congress to look more closely at how local and regional authorities can and should approach language issues raised by their citizens. The main reference text for the Congress on this subject is the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148), which in 2018 celebrated twenty years of entry into force, and which has its own monitoring mechanism, the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

4. Article 10 of this Charter provides valuable guidance for the use of regional or minority languages by local and regional authorities in public life, which deserves the attention of all local and regional authorities, irrespective of whether their national governments are Parties to the Charter.

5. But whereas the Charter restricts its application to languages which have been present in a territory for over a hundred years, local and regional authorities have to provide services according to the current demographic profile of their citizens. Language is primarily a tool for communication, and local and regional authorities should be free to use non-official languages in the conduct of their work, if this will enable them to better communicate with a target group.

6. Since each town and city has its own specific demographic profile, in order to provide the most effective services, each of them should carry out a detailed assessment of the language needs of its citizens and other persons who use its public services.

7. 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 minority language speakers and speakers of the official language(s).

8. The Congress therefore:

a. bearing in mind:

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

ii. the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;

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. considering that local and regional authorities are at the forefront of the provision of public services and interaction with the citizens and residents in their territories;

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

i. undertake detailed 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 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 the provision of services in languages other than the official language(s);

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, and unemployment benefits, in the relevant languages;

viii. provide information on taxes in the relevant languages;

ix. provide information on sanctions (such as fines on local transport) 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 safety signs in the relevant languages.

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).