

Vesna Crnić-Grotić

Committee of Experts for the European Charter

For Regional or Minority Languages

**8th Meeting of the Heads of the monitoring and advisory
bodies of the Council of Europe**

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Dear Madam Secretary General, dear colleagues, Dobar dan svima!

It gives me great pleasure to be able to participate in this meeting of the Heads of the monitoring and advisory bodies with the Secretary General even if it's online. Let's hope that our next meeting is going to be in person.

On a personal note, I am pleased to see that more and more monitoring bodies are now chaired by women. Only a couple of years ago, I was the only woman chairing a monitoring body. Perhaps having a female Secretary General of the Council of Europe will be an impetus for more women chairing.

I'm representing the Committee of Experts for the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. This is the only treaty that is dedicated entirely to the protection and promotion of regional or minority languages, not just in Europe, but in the world. So it's like a small jewel in the crown, if you like, of the Council of Europe. Its primary goal is to preserve these languages as the living languages of their communities and the cultural heritage of Europe, but also to contribute to social cohesion and mutual understanding in states parties. We have already discussed the problems with the use of regional or minority languages in the times of this pandemic during the meeting we had less than two weeks ago. We emphasised how a number of states parties to this treaty failed to honour their legal obligations with respect to emergency announcements and education in regional or minority languages.

However, we noticed with pleasure that sign languages were given importance. We as the Charter have been approached over the years by the speakers of sign languages requiring to be covered either by the Charter or by a separate instrument. We considered that the Charter was not the appropriate instrument and that a special instrument dedicated to the protection of sign languages would be welcome.

For today's three minutes, please allow me to focus on three items that we think are important for the future application of the Charter.

1. Raise the number of states parties to the Charter – it's been 20 years since some of the member states promised to ratify the Charter as part of their accession requirements. However, there seems to be no political pressure or will to insist on the fulfilment. It would benefit the image of the Council of Europe if such promises were not ignored and if the Committee of Ministers (CM) and you Madam Secretary General would use your authority to remind them of their commitment.

2. Ensure the implementation of the CM recommendations - every monitoring system makes sense if the implementation is improved with every monitoring round. Often, we find that we have to repeat the recommendations over and over again thus projecting the image of a failed system. Again, the CM should try to insist but also assist states parties to fully implement the recommendations. This could be done through support to national capacity building and involve all stakeholders of the Charter process: authorities, minority language speakers and the Council of Europe.
3. Finally, continue with efforts to create synergy between “sister” monitoring bodies – this already started a couple of years ago and has shown positive results in the exchange of information and views, for example, between our Comex and the Advisory Committee of the FCNM. There is now a new initiative to establish close co-operation with the new Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) with a view to promoting understanding of, and political support for the need to fully implement the Charter.

The COVID-19 pandemic created many challenges. Let’s use them to renew our commitment to protect minority rights as part of the “new normal”.

Thank you for your attention.