

The Council of Europe Language Charter – perspectives, impact and effectiveness

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I. Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure for me to address you here today and to give you an insight into the work of the Council of Europe, and in particular that of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in preserving our linguistic heritage.

Europe has a large array of linguistic diversity, and here I am neither speaking of Europe of the 15 nor that of the 25 but that of the 45 of the Council of Europe. The preservation of the linguistic diversity in Europe is a real challenge and demands an enormous effort on the part of states, the speakers of regional or minority languages, NGOs and professionals using the minority languages in the public services, at state, local and regional level, including teachers, judges, mayors, public officers etc.

II. The Council of Europe's role in promoting languages – all languages

As this conference focuses on the framework for ALL languages, I find it appropriate, before going into details on the Charter, to mention briefly the work of the Council of Europe in respect of OTHER languages, that is other than regional or minority languages.

The Council of Europe has developed an international or pan-European consensus on principles and standards to guide the promotion of languages. Through its work, it has recommended on a number of occasions the promotion of linguistic diversity in its 45 member states and encouraged the plurilingualism of its citizens. This has been formulated in a number of documents¹ elaborated to provide a legal and political basis for languages in the Europe of today, both supporting linguistic diversity in multilingual societies and facilitating the development of plurilingualism among European citizens.

¹ Conventions:

- ?? European Cultural Convention (19 December 1954)
- ?? European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, treaty open for signature on 5 November 1992 (<http://conventions.coe.int/>).
- ?? Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, treaty open for signature on 1 February 1995 (<http://conventions.coe.int/>).

Policy recommendations:

- ?? Resolution (69) 2 elaborated at the conclusion of the CDCC "Major Project" established following upon the Conference of European Ministers of Education (Hamburg 1961)
- ?? Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (<http://cm.coe.int/>)
 - ?? Recommendation R (82)18 based on the results of the CDCC Project N° 4 ("Modern Languages 1971-1981")
 - ?? Recommendation R (98) 6 based on the results of the CDCC Project "Language Learning for European Citizenship" (1989 – 1996)
- ?? Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (<http://assembly.coe.int/>)
 - ?? Recommendation 1383 (1998) devoted to "Linguistic Diversity"
 - ?? Recommendation 1539 (2001) on the European Year of Languages 2001

A. Education of all languages

Policies for language education should promote the learning of several languages (European and others) for all individuals thereby encouraging plurilingualism and intercultural citizenship, developing language skills and linguistic tolerance necessary for life in an increasingly interactive Europe. This provides grounds for the respect of language rights and maintenance of the European linguistic environment. The Education Directorate of the Council of Europe has developed very interesting tools to help European citizens and professionals to create a common educational culture of understanding of language learning and teaching among language professionals. These tools are designed to plan and implement language education policy which have been developed since the early 1970s. These include:

- the series of *Levels* (Threshold and higher/lower specifications) which provide descriptions of learning objectives for specific languages,
- the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF): learning, teaching, assessment* which establishes a common approach to describing levels of attainment in language learning and a common language for describing the processes and means of language teaching and learning,
- the *European Language Portfolio* - a personal document designed to motivate learners to learn a range of languages throughout life and in which they can record their linguistic and intercultural experiences and achievements in an internationally transparent manner.
- *Manual for relating language examinations to the CEF*

The Language Policy Division has published a pilot edition of a Manual to assist member states, national and international providers of examinations to relate their certificates and diplomas to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Relating an examination or test to the CEF is a complex endeavour. The existence of such a relation is not a simple observable fact, but is an assertion for which the examination provider needs to provide both theoretical and empirical evidence. The Manual gives techniques and guidance for producing this evidence.

Videos and CD-ROMs are being produced to accompany the Manual and illustrate language competence at the 6 levels of the CEF.

The Manual was developed by a group of five authors in co-operation with a group of consultants. One of the authors is Dr Neus Figueras Casanovas, from the Education Department of the Generalitat de Catalunya.

B. Sign languages

For a few years now the Council of Europe has also been looking into solutions for sign languages. Initially the users of sign languages requested that sign languages be included and recognised in the ECRML, but it became clear almost from the beginning that the needs of the sign language speakers were varied, covering not only cultural aspects, but more importantly many social cohesion needs, which the Charter does not elaborate in great detail. For instance one of the most urgent needs is the integration of sign language speakers into the working environment. It has been considered that it would be wiser and more effective to try to find another means of giving recognition to sign languages than in the Charter as such. Sign language users wish for an official recognition of their language at national level as well as at European level. To respond to this wish, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted a Recommendation in 2003, to be addressed to member states confirming that official recognition of sign languages will help deaf people to become integrated into society and gain

access to justice, education and employment. In this document the Assembly recommends, among other things, the drafting of a specific legal instrument addressing the needs/rights of sign language users.²

² **Recommendation 1598 (2003)***

Protection of sign languages in the member states of the Council of Europe
(http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=http%3A%2F%2Fassembly.coe.int%2FDocuments%2FAdoptedText%2Fta03%2FEREC1598.htm#_ftn1#_ftn1)

1. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its Recommendation 1492 (<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=http%3A%2F%2Fassembly.coe.int%2FDocuments%2FAdoptedText%2FTA01%2FEREC1492.htm>) (2001) on the rights of national minorities, and particularly paragraph 12.xiii concerning sign languages.
2. The Assembly takes note of the reply by the Committee of Ministers to this recommendation, contained in Document 9492. It regrets that the Committee of Ministers did not make a pronouncement on the opinions delivered by the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148) and by the Committee on the Rehabilitation and Integration of People with Disabilities (Partial Agreement). This reply warrants, if any justification were needed, the Parliamentary Assembly's concern that the rights of sign language users should be incorporated into a specific legal instrument, or into an additional protocol to the charter, without prejudging the position that may be adopted by the organisations representing deaf people.
3. The Assembly recognises sign languages as the expression of Europe's cultural wealth. They are a feature of Europe's linguistic and cultural heritage.
4. The Assembly also recognises sign languages as a complete and natural means of communication for deaf people.
5. The Assembly takes the view that official recognition of these languages will help deaf people to become integrated into society and gain access to justice, education and employment.
6. The Assembly acknowledges the importance of a detailed study of requirements, necessarily preceding the framing of any policy on sign languages. It stresses the need to involve users of these languages in the process.
7. The Assembly observes that a number of member states have introduced programmes in support of sign languages. Although all experience a shortage of sign language interpreters, this demonstrates the strength of demand and the positive and inclusive social benefits such services provide.
8. The Assembly takes the view that official recognition of sign languages will facilitate the training, recruitment and retention of more interpreters.
9. For the above reasons, and in the knowledge that only action at European level will afford a solution to this problem, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers devise a specific legal instrument on the rights of sign language users, and accordingly:
 - i. instruct the relevant bodies of the Council of Europe to undertake a preparatory study in consultation with national experts and representatives of the deaf community in order to clarify outstanding issues in regard to the protection of the use of sign languages;
 - ii. define clear goals to be achieved, exact deadlines to be met, and resources and methods to be used, founded on a full study of requirements with the mandatory participation of associations representing the users of these languages;
 - iii. consider drafting an additional protocol to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages incorporating sign languages into the charter, among the non-territorial minority languages.
10. The Assembly also recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage member states:
 - i. to give the sign languages used in their territory formal recognition;
 - ii. to train sign language interpreters and sign language tutors;
 - iii. to give education in sign languages to deaf people;
 - iv. to train teachers, in preparation for working with deaf and hearing-impaired children, in sign languages;
 - v. to broadcast television programmes in sign languages, and make sign language subtitling of programmes transmitted in spoken language a general practice;
 - vi. to inform deaf and hearing-impaired people about the use of sign languages;

C. Romani language

The Council of Europe is increasingly focusing its attention on the Romani language. First of all the Charter does make a specific reference to non-territorial languages in article 7.5 of Part II of the Charter, thereby granting a certain level of protection to the Romani languages. In some cases Romani has been identified under Part III of the Charter as a territorial language, for example in the Land of Hessen in Germany and in Slovakia.

As part of a multi-annual project run by the Education Directorate of the Council of Europe, the Migration and Roma/Gypsies Department helped to organise a seminar on harmonisation of teaching materials in Romani (26-27 May 2003). This seminar brought together representatives of the education services of various member States as well as experts in the language field and in the teaching of Roma culture and history. The leading idea of the project is to pool existing teaching materials in the mother tongue (Romani) in order to cut production costs and then to have them translated and adapt them to the situation of each member State. The follow-up to this first meeting will be discussed in early 2004. In connection with this project, a meeting was held in Dijon (France) on training of (Roma) mediators and teachers in schools. An information brochure describing the project and its objectives has also been produced in English, French and Romani.

D. Languages of migrants

The Council of Europe has also looked at the situation of migrants and their languages, but more from a social point of view than for the preservation of the European cultural heritage. The question is whether immigrants can claim the same or similar language rights as stipulated in the Framework Convention or the Language Charter. It is true that the languages of migrants have not received as much attention as regional or minority languages. Most governments are of the opinion that immigrant language issues deserve to be addressed separately from those of minorities or minority languages and, if appropriate, through a specific instrument.

Some countries have made and continue to make available considerable resources for the learning and teaching of the national language, through the development of curricula, teaching materials, tests and attainment targets for second-language education. Educational programmes are often tailored to the specific needs of categories of immigrants, such as newcomers and their children, refugees, young people, men and women.

vii. to utilise the new technologies and make them available to deaf people;

viii. to include sign languages as a valid academic qualification in mainstream secondary schools with equal status to other taught languages;

ix. to grant deaf people the right to choose freely between oral and bilingual school systems;

x. to subsidise the publication of instructive literature in sign languages.

**Assembly debate on 1 April 2003 (11th Sitting) (see Doc. 9738 (<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=http%3A%2F%2Fassembly.coe.int%2FDocuments%2FWorkingDocs%2Fdoc03%2FEDOC9738.htm>), report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Bruce; and Doc. 9765 (<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=http%3A%2F%2Fassembly.coe.int%2FDocuments%2FWorkingDocs%2Fdoc03%2FEDOC9765.htm>), opinion of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Baroness Knight).*

Text adopted by the Assembly on 1 April 2003 (11th Sitting).

Some countries have gone a step further and have introduced instruction in the immigrants' native language and culture. This type of instruction was initially aimed at assisting returning migrants to re-integrate their country of origin. Migrants became immigrants and mother tongue or home language teaching was seen as a means to bridge the gap between the language spoken in the immigrants' home and in society. This would enhance the possibilities to integrate into the host society. In some countries the instruction in the immigrants' language and culture has become part of cultural policies. The language and culture of immigrants are regarded as valuable contributions to cultural pluralism. From an economic perspective such instruction is favoured because multilingual staff facilitates access to other countries and markets.

E. National Minorities

Besides the Charter, a second important instrument of the Council of Europe is the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which also focuses in some areas on the use of languages spoken by national minorities. This human rights treaty, however, does not go into as much detail as the Charter with regard to language and gives fewer guidelines on language policy as such – but it does take a step further in other human rights issues.

III. The Charter as a tool for minority language policy

This brings me back to the Charter, which we consider as a tool, an international legal instrument, which when ratified by a state creates a certain personalised framework, recognising the value of preserving regional or minority languages and providing concrete measures to be undertaken by the state to the benefit of the languages in question. This treaty, once ratified by a country, seeks to ensure that the languages can be used actively in public and private life, even if their speakers are able to communicate in the official language(s).

Europe is not only characterised by a multitude of languages, but also by a great diversity of situations concerning these languages, including the varying number of speakers of a language, or the level of concentration of the speakers in a certain territory of the state. The authors of the Charter recognised the need to accommodate this diversity and adopted an instrument requiring states to take into consideration the real needs of the languages.

The system established by the Charter is widely known: the undertakings concerning policy and legislation in Part II, which apply to all languages, whether they are mentioned or not in the instrument of ratification, and the detailed measures in Part III with the flexible *à la carte* system taking into account the great differences in the objective situation of the different regional or minority languages in Europe.

A. Definition

Article 1 of the Charter defines the scope of application to languages that are traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State's population and are different from the official language(s) of the State. The languages cannot include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants.

B. The protection

The core principles applicable to all regional or minority languages in a State Party are then presented in Article 7 of Part II, which contains general objectives and principles required to guide each State in the promotion and the protection of the use of all regional or minority languages used on the State's territory in public and private life. These aims and principles include, in particular, recognition of the language as an attribute of a community, respect for the

geographical area in which each language is spoken, facilitation of the written and oral use of these languages in public, social and economic life and the teaching and study of these language at all the appropriate stages. The State is not obliged at the time of ratification to identify those languages. However, at a later stage, when the initial periodical report is submitted to the Council of Europe, the State will be required to provide information on how each of those languages are protected and promoted in accordance with Part II.

Part III serves to translate the general principles affirmed in Part II into precise rules. States undertake to apply those provisions of Part III to which they have subscribed. Firstly they have to specify the languages to which they agree this part will be applied, and then they have to select at least thirty-five undertakings in respect of each. A large number of provisions consist of several options, of varying degrees of stringency, one of which has to be chosen "according to the situation of each language".

The parties are subsequently encouraged to add to their commitments, as their legal situation develops or as their financial circumstances allow (article 3.2).

The areas of public life, each corresponding to an article of Part III, from which these specific undertakings must be chosen, are the following:

- Education
- Judicial authorities
- Administrative authorities and public services
- Media
- Cultural activities and facilities
- Economic and social life
- Transfrontier exchanges

C. The Monitoring

The key element in the good functioning of the Charter is its control mechanism, established to evaluate the real application of the Charter in the States Parties and, where necessary, recommend improvements in their legislation, policy and practice.

The Charter does not speak of human rights, as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, but it focuses on cultural and linguistic rights. The Charter does however elaborate in great detail on the obligations of states, which is why I said earlier that the Charter is a tool for states, because it is the state that is obliged to implement the Charter not the Council of Europe. Reading through its text this becomes clear.

In so far as rights are or can be the consequence of obligations, it is not the individual citizens that are the repositories of those rights but the other Parties to the convention.³ This can imply, in some cases, that the best way to implement the state obligations at national level is through domestic legislation, granting rights to speakers of the relevant languages. The Charter, under the close observation of the Committee of Experts requires active participation on the part of the state, by adopting legislation, creating a language policy, implementing regulation, making available language training, etc. In order to fulfil the Charter, the state is encouraged to act and not to remain a passive actor in the linguistic landscape of the country. It is not enough to ratify and sit back and observe.

The Charter having been in force since 1998, it is now safe to say that the monitoring mechanism is functioning properly. The central element of this mechanism is the independent Committee of Experts which reports to the Committee of Ministers on its assessment of

³ Philip Blair, *The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Language and Law in Northern Ireland*, Queen's University, Belfast, 2003.

compliance by a Party with its undertakings. The Committee's role is to evaluate, in the light of each State's undertaking, the existing legal acts, regulations and actual practice applied to its regional or minority languages. The Committee gathers information both from the relevant authorities and from independent sources within the State, to obtain a just and fair overview of the real language situation.

After a preliminary examination of the initial periodical report presented by a State Party, the Committee submits, if necessary, a number of questions to the government concerned to procure supplementary information on matters it considers insufficiently developed in the report itself. This written procedure is usually followed up by an "on-the-spot visit" of a delegation of the Committee to the State concerned. During this visit the delegation meets bodies and associations whose work is closely related to the use of the relevant languages, and consults the authorities on matters that have been brought to its attention. This information-gathering process is designed to enable the Committee to better evaluate the application of the Charter in a State.

Having concluded this process, the Committee of Experts adopts its own report. This report is submitted to the Committee of Ministers together with suggestions for recommendations which the latter could address to one or more Parties as may be required.

IV. The impact of the Charter at national level and at European level **Results of the monitoring mechanism at national level**

Before going into the fine details of the results of the monitoring mechanism, I would like to underline and point out that there is no perfect country with the perfect mechanism, structure, policy or practice. Unfortunately there are problems everywhere but I am going to try to give you a more transversal view of the problems, or in some cases good practice, which the Committee of Experts has observed.

Experience shows that an important indirect effect of the monitoring procedure is the initiation of a dialogue inside the State itself, between the users of the languages in question and those responsible for applying the Charter in practice at national, regional or local level. Active participation in policy evaluation by those affected by the policy is an essential prerequisite for a real improvement of the situation of the languages.

Given that the Parties are required to submit three-yearly reports on the measures they have taken to protect and promote regional or minority languages in accordance with the Charter, this monitoring process is designed to institute a permanent dialogue with each State and to encourage it to gradually reach a higher level of commitment.

The Charter has helped to identify problems that are common to most States Parties and this has been outlined in the report of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to the Parliamentary Assembly (2000 and 2002).

The Charter is not self-executing, implying the need for states to take very specific measures to adopt legislation, if it does not already exist. It is not enough to have ratified the Charter and to expect State administrations, not to mention local and regional administrations, to take up the necessary provisions in their policy and practice. This is sometimes a difficult message to get across – there is sometimes a need to adopt laws to ensure this. This does not mean, however, that if no national law has been adopted, the Charter does not apply. The State Party that has ratified the Charter is under the international obligation to apply the Charter at national level.

In some countries, there is already a good legal foundation for the protection of the languages, for example in Finland there is mention of some of the languages in the Constitution, and language acts have been adopted for the Part III languages. However, there is often a lack of precise and concrete regulations and in particular practice to implement the existing language

legislation. The Committee of Experts often criticises this point. It is true that things cannot change over night, but in second monitoring rounds we have noticed a change in mentality and enthusiasm.

The existence of a solid legal foundation often calls for the creation and maintenance of a coherent language policy to fulfil the requirements of the law. This applies equally to the “Part II” and the “Part III” languages. When a language policy exists, in most cases it is only for the Part III languages, and less attention has been given to the Part II languages. This is a serious difficulty affecting in particular non-territorial languages such as Romani – and particularly relevant for the majority of the future members of the EU where many speakers of Romani reside. The Committee of Experts has drawn attention to this lacuna in state policy and legislation. Part II of the Charter is an essential element of the Charter, one which is in fact the foundation of Part III and should not at all be taken lightly by the State Party.

Another crucial factor observed by the Committee of Experts is the need to involve local and regional authorities more closely in the implementation of the Charter. These authorities do not always receive sufficient guidance from central authorities, as I have mentioned earlier. The importance of local and regional democracy, and local autonomy should of course not be undermined, but these notions and this reality should not be used as an excuse to avoid taking responsibility for international obligations. Let me demonstrate this difficulty with a practical example: Sweden has a very strong tradition of local self government, and has left many important matters in the hands of the municipalities in Norbotten County where most of the minority languages are used. Pre-school education in minority languages is one of these matters, which is an extremely important element in minority language maintenance. This means that the actual implementation of certain provisions of the Charter is entirely dependent on the political will of the municipalities. The reality in Sweden is such that where the mayor is favourable there are good provisions and where the mayor is not supportive, nothing is done. The fact that the central authorities have given a certain autonomy to the municipalities should not be an excuse for not implementing internationally binding obligations.

The role of local and regional authorities is very different from one country to another, but it is important to keep in mind that they often have a key role in education, local and regional administration, transfrontier exchanges, cultural life, social and health services. In some cases these authorities have received no information at all on the obligations under the Charter, which shows the extreme importance of consulting these authorities prior to ratification, ensuring a steady effective information flow down to grass root level and to involve the local and regional authorities as often as possible in any decisions under their responsibility.

This brings me to the importance of an effective information policy, not only from central level down to local level, but all the way down to grass root level. The Committee of Experts has noted that regional or minority language speakers are not always aware that they can and have the right to use their language to communicate with the authorities, or that they are entitled to education in/of their mother tongue. The reality is that the legislation may be adopted, passed and entered into force, but in practice the speakers are not aware of this and have no practical guidelines as to how they can make use of the possibility of using their language.

In the minority language world, the so-called “trouble makers” are a very common phenomenon! Why would you want to use a minority language before a court – and a judge- when you are fully competent to speak in the official language of the State? Why would one complicate things? There is a real need for a change of mentalities and this is the responsibility of the Central State.

Allow me to mention briefly a few very specific areas of difficulties which most states experience:

In education, the Committee of Experts has noted

?? an inadequacy of the conceptual and organisational framework for minority language education at pre-school, primary school and secondary school

- ?? inadequate or even non-existent training for regional or minority language teachers
- ?? a lack of teaching materials

In justice and administration,

- ?? the possibility to use regional or minority languages before the Court is usually guaranteed by legal provisions, but the practice often lags behind
- ?? inadequate language skills of the personnel/lack of qualified interpreters

Media

- ?? Regional or minority languages are unfortunately largely absent from the media, as they represent little interest for the commercial media – there is a need to compensate for the absence of this very important dimension for the preservation of these languages as living languages.

All of these lacunas have been pointed out by the Committee of Experts, both through its precise observations, presented in its report to the Committee of Ministers, and in the latter's Recommendations addressed to the state in question. This process helps the state to realise and to assess the vulnerability of regional or minority languages as well as to identify specific problem areas; it addresses constructive comments/recommendations; it identifies and disseminates good practices.

This whole mechanism is a process of international co-operation, but it seeks to fully involve central, regional and local authorities of the States Parties, as well as representatives of the languages and other members of the civil society. Legislation, practice and mentality cannot be changed overnight with a ratification of treaty. We have to look at this as a dynamic process which will take time, and the Charter is one of the tools that we can use to achieve our objective.

V. The perspectives of the Charter The States Parties – a disappointment?

Today⁴ there are 17 States Parties, and 13 others have signed.

A first general remark regarding signature and ratification is the fact that several present Member States of the European Union have not ratified or signed the Charter which shows that the protection of linguistic diversity has not yet gained enough importance in Europe.

It is a disappointment that some present and future EU Member States have not even signed the Charter: Belgium, Greece, Ireland and Portugal, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In most of these states the question of language is extremely sensitive.

The fact that some EU Member States or future EU Member States signed the Charter already some time ago but have not yet ratified is regrettable. In this context, there are some encouraging signs (the ratification process is thus well under way in Italy), but I cannot help mentioning the situation in France, where the perspectives of ratification look very pessimistic and the process⁵ is basically blocked. There are many reasons for being unsatisfied about France's position when one looks at it from European perspective. One reason is that in France there are many languages which are in need of protection and secondly, France is not exactly a model in this field but the problem is that several European countries still look at France as a model and might therefore draw arguments from the French position in order to avoid taking on

⁴ 24 March 2004

⁵ France signed the Charter in May 1999 but soon after, in June 1999, the "Conseil constitutionnel" declared the ratification of the Charter incompatible with the French Constitution, namely with Article 2 (which provides that French is the language of the Republic) and with fundamental principles of the French State such as territorial integrity and equality. Of course, we don't have the time now to look into the details but it should be added that many experts thought that after this decision only a change of the French Constitution would allow for the ratification of the Charter to go ahead.

obligations at the European level in this field. Needless to say, this raises great concern particularly in respect of some countries from Central and Eastern Europe who will sooner or later join the European Union and where the linguistic issues are delicate and of great importance.

I would also like to add that the position of Luxembourg, which signed the Charter already in 1992 and still has not ratified it, raises questions too.

VI. Europe 2004

The territorial scope of the Charter is pan-European and it is a solid legal instrument which paves the way towards a more concrete language policy, and more importantly a policy which is monitored regularly. More than half of the existing member States of the EU have ratified the Charter and a majority of future member States have either signed or ratified it. Even if there are still states missing from the European language landscape in this respect the Charter could still serve as a reference for future activity of the European Union for the protection of linguistic diversity. In this context, it is with great satisfaction that we welcome the fact that the European Union institutions recognise the importance of the Charter and in particular, in two recent texts

- ?? the Action plan “promoting language learning and linguistic diversity” of the European Commission,
- ?? the Ebner resolution and recommendations adopted by the European Parliament on 4 September 2003:
 - o calls on the Commission and member States and candidate countries to ensure the ratification of the Charter
 - o considers that the Commission and the Parliament should be regularly and officially informed by the secretariat of the Charter
 - o asks the Commission to take into account the findings of the monitoring of the Charter and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities when determining aims, financial guidelines and priorities as well as to “apply the principles and objectives of the Charter as a benchmark in assessing compliance of the applicant countries with the obligations regarding the protection of their minorities”

VI. Conclusion

The Charter is one tool at the disposal of States to pave the way for a better preservation of the linguistic diversity of Europe. I consider it difficult to make a distinction between the new and the old Europe, because I find it to be the responsibility of Europe as a whole to preserve its European linguistic diversity, including the old, the new and the future European States, in the understanding of the European Union.

I find the Charter to be an excellent tool for the preservation of our linguistic diversity, because I see, through this living legal instrument, how it can change mentalities, raise awareness and in reality change attitudes towards the use of regional or minority languages. The Committee of Experts fulfils its role and delivers its evaluation through an extensive information gathering procedure. The state and NGOs need to make the most of these conclusions; they need to benefit from the work that lies behind this treaty and to participate fully in the monitoring by helping to fulfil the treaty and the Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers. There is a long way ahead, but every year we move one step further to our objective. It is best to take this step in the same direction.

Thank you for your attention.