

# Committee of Ministers Urges Greater Use of Frisian in Dutch Audiovisual Media

**IRIS 2001-9:1/5**

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In its first recommendations on the application by States Parties of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has called upon the Dutch authorities to "take into account the special needs of broadcasting in Frisian and consider increasing its financial support."

This provides tacit reaffirmation of a key principle underlying Article 11 of the Charter, which focuses on the media. As explained in the Explanatory Report to the Charter, "[T]he time and space which regional or minority languages can secure in the media is vital for their safeguard" (para. 107). The Charter was opened for signature in 1992 and entered into force in 1998 after the necessary five ratifications had taken place. At present, it boasts a total of 15 ratifications/accessions.

The recommendations arose out of the Charter's prescribed monitoring procedures, which are outlined in Articles 15-17 of the Charter. These involve the submission by the States Parties of periodical reports on action taken by them in pursuance of the Charter's provisions; the examination of these reports by a specially-appointed committee of experts (this examination can include the provision of further information by bodies legally established in a concerned State Party); verification/ explanatory communication processes with the State authorities; the compilation of experts' reports and the possibility of their publication. The purpose of rendering public recommendations made to an individual State is to precipitate the adoption of measures that would ensure the honouring of its obligations under the Charter.

Other recommendations directed at the Netherlands include the promotion of the use of Frisian as the medium of instruction in pre-school and primary school; the teaching of the language throughout the education system and also the provision of relevant teachertraining. In addition, the Dutch Government was instructed to ensure that the right to use Frisian in dealings with the judicial and administrative authorities is effective in practice.

Frisian belongs to the Indo-European family of languages and the variety spoken in the Netherlands is known as Frysk (West Frisian). An estimated 450,000 people

are able to speak Frysk and they are concentrated mainly in the province of Fryslan (Friesland).

The Committee of Ministers also addressed recommendations on the application of the Charter to Croatia and Finland.

***Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation  
RecChL(2001)1 on the application of the European Charter for Regional  
or Minority Languages by the Netherlands, 19 September 2001***

