



Strasbourg, 27 September 2006

ECRML
(2006)3

EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES

APPLICATION OF THE CHARTER IN CYPRUS

(Note: The whole Charter is 22 pages, which includes other languages).

The following pages are compiled to include only articles regarding the Western Armenian Language.

The numbering of articles are kept the same as they are in the Original Charter

Armenian

18. According to the information at the Committee of Experts' disposal, the first Armenian-speakers settled in Cyprus during the Byzantine period in the late 6th century and there are records of as many as 10,000. A more recent and main migratory movement to Cyprus took place when thousands of Armenians fled the Ottoman Empire in the wake of the Armenian genocide (1915/16) forming what is called the Armenian Diaspora where large numbers of Armenians settled worldwide. About 1300 remained in Cyprus. Armenian-speakers traditionally inhabited the towns of Larnaca, Limassol and Nicosia. In 1924, to avoid assimilation, the Armenian-speakers decided to teach Armenian to the new generation, and by the mid 1940s, its use in the community was predominant.
19. By 1960, there were about 4000 Armenian-speakers living in Cyprus. Due to the growing civil tensions that followed, many Armenian-speakers left and the Armenian population was reduced by half. In 1963, Nicosia was divided into two, with a UN buffer zone that ran through the centre of the old Armenian quarter of Nicosia where Armenian-speakers had lived for centuries, resulting in their displacement. In 1974, the Armenian-speakers living in the northern part of Cyprus moved to the south, just like the Greek Cypriots.
20. According to the information received during the "on-the-spot" visit from representatives of the Armenian-speakers, until 1960, Armenians lived in self-contained communities and a low prestige was attached to being Armenian. However, this situation has changed and the Armenian-speakers are well integrated into society.
21. According to the information provided by the Cypriot authorities, there are 3 000 Armenian-speakers in Cyprus, of whom 400 are non-Cypriots and recent immigrants. Armenian-speakers constitute 0.4% of the population in the government-controlled area. Most speakers live in the District of Nicosia. According to the Cypriot authorities and the Armenian Representative, there are no Armenians or Armenian-speakers in the territory that is not under government control.
22. Armenian forms a separate branch of the Indo-European language family. In Cyprus, a form of Western Armenian is spoken, which is also spoken by most Armenians of the Diaspora. All Armenians in Cyprus are bilingual in Armenian and Greek except for the recent immigrants, most of whom do not speak Greek.

.....

Armenian

52. The ratification of the Charter with explicit reference to Armenian, may be interpreted as specific recognition of the Armenian language in Cyprus as an expression of cultural wealth.
53. The main legal acts with respect to the recognition of the Armenian language are the following:
- The Agreement between Cyprus and Armenia for Co-operation in the Fields of Culture, Education and Science (Ratification) Law, 1998 (Law 19(III) of 1998);
 - The Program between the Government of the Republic of Armenia and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus on Co-operation in the Fields of Culture, Education and Science in the Years 2001-2004;
 - Memorandum (2004) on the results of the meeting between the President of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Cyprus and the President of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia within the framework of the official visit to the Republic of Armenia of the Cyprus Parliamentary Delegation;
 - Official Languages of the Republic Law 67/1988 as amended by Law 154/1990.
54. The Annual Government Budget earmarks a subsidy for a teacher from Armenia for teaching traditional dances, as well as subsidies for the Armenian Church and for the "Cyprus-Armenia Friendship Society". All other financial assistance to cultural organizations is granted on an ad hoc basis. According to the information provided by the Cypriot authorities, there are a number of Armenian cultural institutions and activities subsidized by and implemented in co-operation with the Ministry of Education and Culture. Such activities include concerts, dance performances, art exhibitions and literary events. These activities to some extent promote the Armenian language.
55. The authorities show sensitivity towards the Armenian language and culture in Cyprus. The delegation received information on the "on-the-spot" visit that the Armenian-speakers were in general pleased with the support the government gives to them and the concern it shows. The Armenian-speakers reported that funds they apply for are usually granted.

.....

Armenian

57. Armenian has been identified as a non-territorial language in Cyprus. There have been no reports brought to the attention of the Committee of Experts that would indicate any administrative divisions constituting any hindrance to the promotion of the Armenian language.

.....

Armenian

61. Although, as mentioned above, there is no overall language plan nor any national strategy plans aiming at the promotion of regional or minority languages in Cyprus, the government has shown resolute action to promote Armenian.
62. The Armenian Nareg primary schools are completely financed by the government. On the “on-the-spot“ visit, when visiting a Nareg school in Nicosia, the delegation was informed by the head of school and a member of the school board that there was excellent co-operation with the government and that any requests for funding were usually granted. A new Nareg school building is currently under construction in Limassol.
63. The Cyprus government must in particular be commended for its quick reaction to the announcement of the closure of the Armenian secondary school, the Melkonian Educational Institute. It approved an additional grant of CYP 100 000 to keep the school open (see para. 88 -92 below).
64. The Committee of Experts trusts that the government will continue its support. Although the Armenian language is widely spoken in the community, it nevertheless remains an endangered language, due to the small size of the community, and it is therefore very important to continue to provide education in Armenian.
-

Armenian

84. The Armenian “Nareg“ primary schools (1st – 7th class) operate in Nicosia, Limassol and Larnaca. The schools are autonomous and governed by a board, composed of members who are appointed by the state upon the recommendation of the Armenian Parliamentary Representative. The board has competence for almost all Nareg-related issues. Nareg schools are supervised by the Ministry of Education and Culture and must fulfill the educational standards applicable to other state primary schools in Cyprus. The schools are completely funded by the government, which covers

- running costs, teachers and staff salaries and textbooks. All schoolbooks are free of charge. As from the education year 2005/06, Armenian textbooks imported from Lebanon and the United States are paid for by the government.
85. According to the initial periodical report, 90% of the Armenian pupils attend the Nareg schools. There would be sufficient capacity for all Armenian children to attend a Nareg school.
 86. Pre-school classes operate under the Nareg schools.
 87. Apart from Greek and English, all subjects in the Nareg primary schools are taught either in Armenian only or bilingually, with a slight decrease of Armenian in the upper two classes. Schoolbooks are either in Greek and taught in Armenian, or in Armenian and imported from abroad.
 88. With regard to secondary education, until June 2005, there was one Armenian secondary school, the Melkonian Educational Institute (MEI) in Nicosia, which was internationally recognized and had existed for over 70 years. Instruction was bilingual, whereby subjects of the Armenian Department (Armenian History, Language, Art, Music etc.) were taught in Western Standard Armenian, and examination subjects (Mathematics, natural and social sciences, etc.) were taught in English. The latter was a European curriculum that prepared pupils for admission to universities worldwide.
 89. The Melkonian Educational Institute, which was for boarders and day students, was an Armenian community and private school as well as a cultural centre for Armenian-speakers. Around 2/3 of the Cypriot Armenians graduating from the Nareg schools attended the MEI. It has been reported to the Committee of Experts that the Armenian schools in Cyprus are very important for raising the standard of spoken and written Western Armenian in Cyprus.
 90. Secondary education at the MEI was subsidized for the Cypriot Armenians by the government, including payment of tuition fees and subsidies for textbooks and teaching staff salaries. This amounted to CYP 40 000 annually. The MEI was the only school worldwide to offer GCE (General Certificate of Education) O-level examinations with Armenian as a subject. It was also the only Western Armenian boarding secondary school in the world.
 91. The Central Board of the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) in New York, an organization that was entrusted with the custodian and management rights of MEI, decided in March 2004 to close down the school by June 2005.

92. The Cyprus government reacted instantly and approved an additional grant of CYP100 000 to allow it to continue its functioning. In addition, in April 2004, it declared part of the buildings and the site on which they lie, as a National Heritage Site. This covers about 60% of the estate.
93. A lawsuit was brought before the District Court of Nicosia questioning the legal entitlement of AGBU to close down the school in August 2005. In order to prevent AGBU from selling the premises of the Melkonian Institute, injunction procedures were initiated as well. The Committee of Experts is aware of the recent court ruling of the District Court of Nicosia imposing an injunction order on the property (February 2006). There is another lawsuit being filed in California/ USA aimed at overturning AGBU's decision to close the Melkonian school.
94. The Committee of Experts is concerned that the closure of the MEI will constitute a danger to the existence of secondary education in Armenian in Cyprus. It therefore hopes that the situation can be resolved soon. It is of vital importance that Armenian-medium education will continue in Cyprus also on the level of secondary education.
95. The delegation was informed during the "on-the-spot" visit that a two-year transition program has been put together by AGBU. A number of former MEI students now attend the American Academy in Nicosia, a private secondary school, and 40 or 50 of them are from abroad and reside on MEI campgrounds. AGBU covers school fees and provides food and lodging. Of 111 MEI pupils, 79 returned after the summer holidays. Armenian classes are restricted to the afternoon from 4-6pm.
96. The Nareg School in Nicosia reacted quickly to the closure of the MEI and in May was granted permission to set up a lower secondary school at Nareg with the 1st year being now fully operational and free of charge for the pupils. Ten students are currently attending this lower secondary school. Nareg will not have the capacity or human and financial resources to run an upper secondary school which would require a wide curriculum. One former MEI teacher is teaching at Nareg.
97. The closure of MEI came as a blow to the Cypriot Armenians and authorities, and it also caused a worldwide reaction from the Armenian Diaspora, since the MEI served the mainly Western Armenian speaking Diaspora. The Committee of Experts acknowledges and commends the support the government is giving to the Armenian-speakers in this difficult situation. The Committee of Experts encourages the authorities to take appropriate steps in order to ensure that secondary education in Armenian will continue to be available. The Committee of Experts would welcome information in the next periodical report about the position of secondary

education in Armenian in Cyprus.

The Committee of Experts encourages the authorities to take appropriate steps in order to ensure that secondary education in Armenian will continue to be available.

98. Technical education, adult education and higher education are not available in Armenian. There are no possibilities for teacher training in Armenian in Cyprus. Also, not many young Armenians are motivated to become teachers due to the lack of career prospects. Teacher training in Armenian is currently not possible in Cyprus. The Committee of Experts encourages the government to consider subsidizing such training, if possible in Cyprus, or else abroad for those Cypriot students who wish to train to teach the Armenian language.

The Committee of Experts encourages the authorities to arrange teacher-training in Armenian.

.....

Armenian

108. Since practically all Armenians in Cyprus speak Armenian, the latter applies. However there is currently no provision for non-speakers to learn the (Western) Armenian language in Cyprus. Cypriot non-Armenian speakers do have the right to attend the Nareg primary school. However, since Nareg schools teach Armenian to mother tongue speakers, the teaching level is probably not suitable or appropriate for non-speakers. According to the information received, at present adult-education is not available to non-speakers. However, the Committee of Experts has also been informed that the State Institute for Further Learning can provide such education if there is a sufficient demand for it. The Committee of Experts encourages the authorities to provide more information with regard to this in the next periodical report.

Armenian

111. According to additional information provided by the Cypriot authorities, as a result of the above-mentioned Agreement on Co-operation in the Fields of Culture Education Science between the governments of Cyprus and Armenia, various groups occasionally visit Cyprus.

112. Moreover, the Ministry of Education and Culture gives financial support and has regular co-operation with the “Cyprus-Armenia Friendship Society” for organizing cultural events and for strengthening ties with Armenia.

Chapter 3 Findings

The Committee of Experts hereby presents its general findings on the application of the Charter in Cyprus.

A. The Cypriot authorities show a high degree of awareness and sensitivity towards the Armenian and the Maronite communities. The authorities give support that reaches beyond financial assistance. The competent ministries work in co-operation with the minorities, or their representatives, take their needs and wishes into account for projects and policies, and have taken resolute action for example in the case of the Melkonian Educational Institute.

B. Western Armenian as spoken traditionally in Cyprus is the form of Armenian spoken by most Armenians of the Diaspora. Cyprus seems to be the only place in Europe where the speakers of Western Armenian have been continuously supported by the Government.

C. The minorities in Cyprus are well integrated into society and are in general satisfied with the degree of protection and support granted by the government. However, awareness of regional or minority languages seems to be fairly recent in Cyprus. As a consequence, there is no legislation or policy as such that aims directly at protecting and promoting regional or minority languages. The focus until now has been on the religious groups. This has in some cases had a positive side-effect on the languages spoken by the respective communities. This is especially the case with Armenian, where governmental support in the field of education and culture, for example, coincides with protecting and promoting the Armenian language.

D. However, this should not conceal the fact that the Armenian language remains in a vulnerable position, where the fragile situation and the possible discontinuing of teaching in/of Armenian at secondary level (caused by the decision of its governing trust to close the Melkonian Institute) could have negative repercussions on the presence of the Armenian language in Cyprus.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

Recommendation RecChL(2006)3 of the Committee of Ministers on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by Cyprus

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 27 September 2006 at the 974th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

The Committee of Ministers,

In accordance with Article 16 of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;

Having regard to the declarations submitted by Cyprus on 4 August 2005;

Having taken note of the evaluation made by the Committee of Experts on the Charter with respect to the application of the Charter by Cyprus;

Bearing in mind that this evaluation is based on information submitted by Cyprus in its national report, supplementary information provided by the Cypriot authorities, information submitted by bodies and associations legally established in Cyprus and information obtained by the Committee of Experts during its "on-the-spot" visit;

Recommends that the authorities of Cyprus take account of all the observations of the Committee of Experts and, as a matter of priority:

- 1 Apply Part II protection to Cypriot Maronite Arabic as a regional or minority language in Cyprus within the meaning of the Charter and strengthen in particular the teaching of Cypriot Maronite Arabic at primary school level;
- 2 Take measures to ensure that teaching in and of Armenian at secondary level remains available;
- 3 Adopt a structured policy for the protection and promotion of the Armenian and Cypriot Maronite Arabic languages.