

21 February – International Mother Language Day

Strasbourg, 21 February 2015. On the occasion of the International Mother Language Day the Council of Europe reiterates its commitment to protecting and promoting regional or minority languages as integral part of European cultural heritage and diversity.

The Council of Europe promotes a Europe based on tolerance, mutual understanding and dialogue, where all people can live together peacefully. Linguistic and cultural diversity are assets to European societies.

The right to use one's mother tongue is a basic human right. The use of the mother tongue is protected and promoted by the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML), the only legally-binding international treaty worldwide for traditionally used minority languages. It thereby also helps to keep threatened lesser-used languages alive as part of the intangible cultural heritage in Europe, thus allowing them to continue contributing to the cultural wealth and diversity of a country.

The Charter promotes the use of regional and minority languages in almost all domains of public life, such as education, justice, administration, media, culture, economic and social affairs, as well as trans-frontier co-operation. To date, the Charter has been ratified by twenty-five member states of the Council of Europe and signed by another eight.

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly in its Recommendation 1740 (2006) stresses that it "would be desirable to encourage, as far as possible, young Europeans to learn their mother tongue (or main language) when this is not an official language of their country." This recommendation refers to the place of the mother tongue in school education and therefore calls upon national ministries of education to consider supporting language learning beyond languages officially included in national curricula.

Clearly both formal as well as non-formal/informal learning contexts are relevant for establishing learning scenarios for enhanced mother tongue learning. Significant expertise and practical know-how for developing quality language education at national level has been built up through the professional platform of the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (ECML). By working with decision makers in member states and by bringing together language experts across Europe and beyond, the ECML develops innovative, research- and policy-informed approaches which enhance the learners' linguistic and cultural repertoire.

Acknowledging the role of the mother tongue in the overall learning process as well as providing effective support for developing mother tongue competences are at the core of the ECML's current programme entitled "Learning through languages. Promoting inclusive, plurilingual and intercultural education". Ongoing projects reach out to include parents and the wider community and encourage them to play their part in supporting plurilingual and intercultural education. The dedicated website for the "European Day of Languages" (www.coe.int/edl) hosted jointly by the Language Policy Unit and the ECML demonstrates the importance of celebrating mother tongues and further promotes the value of all languages.

Language education in the widest sense – the learning and teaching of all languages, as well as the provision for teacher education and the implementation of language policies – is key to support in the mother tongue: lifelong, quality language education for educational and professional success as well as for personal development and a sense of self-worth, all of which help foster economic growth, democratic citizenship and social cohesion.

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The date represents the day in 1952 when students from different educational institutions such as Dhaka University, Jagannath University and Dhaka Medical College, demonstrating for recognition of their languages of the then Pakistan, were shot and killed by police in Dhaka.