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Members of the Committee of Experts of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*  
of the Council of Europe  
Directorate General IV - Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport  
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France

*Subject:* contribution of the *Feriening Frysk Underwiis* (FFU) to the hearing of the Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe on the implementation of the 48 treaty obligations from part III of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* on March 2, 2016.

Ljouwert/Leeuwarden, March 20, 2016

**Right Honourable Members of the Committee of Experts,**

Hereby we give you our specific comments on the education-domain article 8 of the European Charter (par. 1, sub-paragraphs (a) (ii), (b) (ii), (c) (iii), e. (ii), (f) (i), g, h, i). In general, we as an *Association for Frisian Education (FFU)*, must unfortunately conclude that the language policy of the national Government on Frisian in the education domain gives no progress, as in previous years (see also our FFU-letter of January 24, 2012, which is still current; hereby added). The uniform language and education policy is unilaterally focused on Dutch and accompanying measures for the Frisian language are therefore ineffective in comparison with the effect of the national policy on the transfer of the Dutch language and culture. The growth of the number of Frisian speaking playgrounds and the modest number of tri-lingual elementary schools (Frisian, Dutch and English) are examples of positive exceptions. However, that is not promoted by national policy but by the provincial government.

There is, in the province of Fryslân, no language policy based on equality and equal rights and the consequences are becoming clearer: the next generation makes increasing use of the Dutch language, because the speakers of Frisian in the public space (school square, street, hospitality [‘horeca’], etc.) are sufficient multilingual in contrast to peers who speak other languages. For *writing* the situation is much worse, because learning how to read and write in the Frisian language is primarily a task of education. A large part of the Frisians cannot read Frisian well and most of de Frisian speakers can’t write Frisian. because in general the Frisian schools don’t teach this skill. On the basis of research and experience the fear is justified that - in our contemporary open society and under an unchanged policy - Frisian will in the foreseeable future disappear in Fryslân even as a colloquial language in the public space and hence also in the domestic sphere. Therefore, we urge the Council of Europe to influence the responsible authority in this country effectively.

The fifth report (years 2012-2014) on the implementation of the *European Charter*, presented by the Dutch Government, identifies a number of education measures taken for the Frisian language. It concerns the amendment regarding the attainment targets (‘kerndoelen’) for Frisian (August 1, 2014) in primary and secondary education. New decentralized regulation, which can have a positive effect on its own. However, the requirements and existing regulations for Dutch are such that there can no question of any improvement of the position of Frisian in education. Fundamental reason is that the Dutch government has no interest in the prosperity of the Frisian language and culture and only for

electoral reasons say they want to strengthen the Frisian language and culture. In the following, we will make this clear on the basis of the sub-paragraphs of article 8.

### **Article 8.1, a, ii**

Unlike the federal government the province of Friesland is committed to Frisian or bilingual (Frisian-Dutch) playgroups. In a few years these have increased to a number of 170 in 2014. It does not mean that in all centres of the province of Friesland this provision already exists. In bigger cities with a dominant population Dutch speakers they appear sporadically, while they are also necessary to make all non-Frisian-speaking children familiar with Frisian and for Frisian children to provide for an optimal multilingual language development.

The policy of the national government for children in preschool age ('Voor- en Vroegschoolse Educatie' [VVE]) is only focused on the pursuit to initiate young children in the age of 2-4 years - also Frisian speakers - as well as possible through *national* programs in the Dutch language and culture without taking into account the Frisian situation, all under the pretext of preventing and combating '(language) deficits'. Barely a few years ago the ban on Frisian playgroups through the OKE Act ('*Wet ontwikkelingskansen door kwaliteit en educatie*', 2010) could be prevented.

Research in Fryslân among young children (2-6 years) shows more and more that Frisian-educated children also switch to Dutch at home, when the language environment (day care centres, preschool playgrounds, etc.) is dominantly Dutch-speaking and does not communicate with them in their own (Frisian) language. This to the annoyance of the Frisian-speaking parents.

**Conclusion:** The government policy with regard to early-childhood education in the Frisian language area is **not** aimed at 'to make available a substantial part of pre-school education in the relevant regional or minority languages'.

### **Article 8.1, b, ii**

The currently 70 trilingual schools (Frisian, Dutch and English) mainly occur in the smaller communities at a total number of more than 400 primary schools. These trilingual schools exist in five varieties: the only focused on a basal passive command of Frisian up to the highest interpretation of Frisian as a subject and also as a language of instruction in other subjects. Given that the national government advocates multilingual education for primary school in the form of Dutch-English, Frisian is threatened to be neglected. As a result, it puts the trilingual school in Fryslân under pressure. While just the Frisian trilingual school is a good example of European policy, namely a form of multilingualism, in which three languages are involved: native/local language, regional or national language and an international language.

An amendment of the Primary Education Act ('*Wet op het primair onderwijs*') in connection with the teaching of the Frisian language is aimed at promoting the use of the Frisian language in the province of Fryslân and to contribute to the quality of Frisian in education. For this purpose, the power to determine the core objectives Frisian language in the Law on Primary Education (and the Law on secondary education and the Expertise Centres Act) is delegated to the Provincial Council of the province of Friesland

It provides the Provincial Council of Fryslân the possibility of establishing Frisian by regulation headline ('*kerndoelen Friese taal*'). This finding is **conditional**, namely only following **consultation** ('*draagvlak*') with the Frisian primary education and the **approval** of the Minister. The national

government provides schools with the opportunity making the right to education in Frisian dependent of the *support* among the implementing agencies. Thus, they weakened the position of the Province in her new task. The probability that a deterioration of the headline Fries and the core goals ('kerndoelen') will be the result, is not imaginary.

In the same legislation the Executive Council ('Gedeputeerde Staten') of Fryslân got the new task on request of the school board to grant not only full but also *partial* exemption from the obligation to provide education in Frisian. The established policy (June 2015) takes as its starting point the *average* level of proficiency of Frisian within the school community or municipality/municipalities where the school is located. It takes **not** its starting point in the optimal development or in the development opportunities where the children are entitled to (for example, through a differentiated program with a view to the initial situation of pupils with a Frisian and a non-Frisian background). School managers with a negative attitude in this matter get any space to choose even a lower limit than a passive, receptive command of Frisian. Despite the fact that the national government in the 5th report (mentioned above) still speaks about the importance of the proficiency of Frisian reading and writing skills for the future of the Frisian language community, these key objectives are first eligible for exemption. Even for native speakers of Frisian!

The inspectorate assesses since the introduction of Frisian in primary education only periodically its quality. The inspection is in his report ('Tussen wens en werkelijkheid', 2010) again dissatisfied with the quality and will not make future research on the quality of education in Frisian if pupils in primary schools cannot be assessed on the basis of standardized tests. This student tracking system is still under construction at this time (2016). Meanwhile, there is no monitoring of the quality of education in Frisian since 2010. The high requirements for Dutch remain unchanged in the regular inspection or in the supervision. The result is that schools, depending on attitudes of management and teachers and the percentage of Frisian pupils at the school, do not take seriously the teaching of Frisian.

The law on special education ('Wet op de ExpertiseCentra'/WEC) is focused on basic and secondary education en gives only the *optional* possibility to teach Frisian. According to the inspection report of 2010 Frisian is only used at some schools in informal conversations and/or one-on-one situations. The Frisian language hardly plays a role as a language of instruction. But precisely for these children the development of their mother tongue is to be regarded as a prerequisite.

In 2015 published the *Education Platform 2032* ('Platform Onderwijs 2032') - on behalf of Secretary Dekker - its final recommendations *Our Education 2032* ('Ons onderwijs 2032') on the future of the Dutch education. In this final advice - after a dialogue with the 'society' - is paid no heed to the Frisian bilingual situation and the legal obligation to provide education in Frisian. The ratified *European Charter* (in 1995) and the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (adopted in 2005) - in our case the obligations relating to Frisian - played no role. By proposing to give only Dutch and English a place in the basic curriculum ('kerncurriculum') and a central testing of these subjects at the end of both primary and secondary schools, education in Frisian will be downgraded to an insignificant phenomenon in the own language area.

**Conclusion:** The Dutch education policy is **not** aimed at providing a 'substantial part of primary education in the relevant regional or minority language', respectively *Frisian*. The new regulations in the context of the decentralization of the core objectives for Frisian gives the province of Fryslân little or no potential to trigger an emancipation process because of the restrictions and the strong continuing focus on the quality of the dominant Dutch language, all at the expense of a more equal

position of education in Frisian. That there are still some schools that do well, is not thanks to the education policy, but despite that policy. It comes only through the care and concerns of teachers and principals with a positive attitude for the Frisian language and culture.

The law on special education (WEC) has to be brought into line with the Charter. This law should require the Frisian schools to give sufficient attention to the Frisian language and culture in all grades.

### **Article 8.1, c, iii**

The inspectorate depicts in its report ‘Tussen wens en werkelijkheid’ (2010) the same negative image for secondary schools as for primary education. The lessons are not sufficiently attuned to the possibilities of the pupils and the quality is not very developed.

The Frisian as a subject is compulsory only in lower secondary education (de ‘brugklas’ or the first year). Formulated attainment target of key objectives (‘kerndoelen’) exists: some are common, some specific to Frisian and one is specifically for non-Frisian-speaking pupils. Friesland's Provincial Executive (‘Gedeputeerde Staten’) may grant exemption (‘ontheffing verlenen’) in accordance with the same procedure (‘Beleidsregel’) as in primary education. Frisian is an elective for the higher grades so far the school is offering the course and the students want to choose the subject.

Frisian can be offered as an examination subject in VMBO, HAVO and VWO and can be chosen by the student. In practice, this is done little. A Frisian secondary school received at his request permission of the Province in 2015 to exchange the mandatory classes Frisian for a project week with widespread attention for the Frisian language and culture in order to achieve that (more) students choose the subject as an examination.

Ain the years 1997-2001 by the province of Fryslân initiated project in secondary schools ‘Towards Frisian as an examination subject in secondary education’ (‘Op weg naar Fries als examenvak in het voortgezet onderwijs’) led by the schools concerned to a slight increase in the number of students that chose Frisian as an examination subject. The researchers recommended that for improving the position of Frisian, it is necessary to remove the Frisian from the marginal role which it has in the schools. Consequently, there must be considerable doubt on the effects of the proposed project week, because Frisian remains marginalized in this way.

The Law on Secondary Education (‘Wet op het voortgezet onderwijs’) gives schools in Fryslân optional the opportunity of using Frisian as a language of instruction in other subjects, depending on the nature of the subject and the origin of the participants according to a code of conduct laid down by the competent authority. The 5th report of the Netherlands indicates that *five* schools have a multilingual stream: Dutch, Frisian and English are functioning as instruction language. The suggestion from the previous sentence that all those school are functioning as real trilingual schools (Dutch, Frisian and English) is wrong. Two random examples:

(1) One school is a certified as a **bilingual** junior school (‘tweetalig onderwijs [‘tto’]) and gives in the grades 1, 2 and 3 secondary school (VWO) 10 courses/subjects entirely in English for the best students and the rest in Dutch. Frisian is **no** course instruction language.

(2) At another school the HAVO- and VWO-pupils follow *Multilingual Secondary Education* (‘Meertalig Voortgezet Onderwijs’). At the courses *Geography* and *Music* the instruction language is English and at the subjects *History* and *Sports/Physical Movement* Frisian. In all other courses Dutch!

The province of Friesland has set a subsidy scheme ‘Frisian lessons in education’ (‘Lesoeren Frysk yn it ûnderwiis’) for the school year 2015-2016 to make it possible that Frisian can be offered after the first class (base; ‘onderbouw’) as an optional course and as an exam in secondary education. For secondary vocational education (‘Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs’ [MBO]) and Practical Education (‘Praktijkonderwijs’) the scheme aims to promote the use of Frisian in professional practice. The Ministry of Education, from the academic year 2016-2017, authorize MBO-schools that 15% of the training may consist of ‘choice parts’, if there is a regional need. Frisian MBO-schools can also use this choice parts for Frisian, in this case for the training ‘Care and Welfare’ (‘Zorg en Welzijn’) and for the training Care and Welfare (Cooperation Vocational Education and Economy).

**Conclusion:** The (national) education policy is - despite attempts to realize some improvements - not really focused on education in Frisian as an *integral* part of the curriculum. Frisian should get off its marginal position in the schools. To be a real *integral* part of the school curriculum it should be a compulsory subject for all pupils (students) and function as a full-fledged language of instruction for various subjects/courses. Moreover, Frisian should not only be a mandatory exam in VMBO, HAVO and VWO for all students, but also in forms of vocational education where Dutch is a required exam. The possibility of optional 'choice parts' Frisian can only be a start.

#### **Article 8.1, e, ii**

For the preservation of the Frisian is a continuous learning from pre-school to higher and university education very important. Instead of the doctoral study Frisian language and literature at the University of Groningen (RuG) the Ba-training Minorities & Multilingualism came up with specific attention for the Frisian language and culture. The cause of this decline represents the marginal position of Frisian in the upper social domains.

Developments related to the previous University Campus Fryslân (UCF) to a branch of the University of Groningen as a eleventh faculty in Ljouwert/Leeuwarden provides opportunities for the study of Frisian as the second national language. The three-year bachelor degree in politics, philosophy, psychology and economics is aimed at increasing knowledge and more jobs in the region, but should also facilitate the development of the Frisian language at scientific level. For the Leeuwarden universities - NHL and Stenden - the same applies. Only the two teacher training departments (‘Pabo’s’) in Fryslân have a direct role for the study of and in Frisian for acquiring an official recognized competence at a sufficient level of Frisian in the primary schools.

**Conclusion:** It is necessary for the future Frisian that it can be studied as the second national language at university level and in higher education. That is important for educational purposes (first and second degree programs and teacher training programs for competence in Frisian in primary schools). But it is also highly significant that parts of the new three-year bachelor degree from the University College Fryslân can be studied in Frisian.

#### **Article 8.1, f, i**

The ‘Algemeine Frisian Underrjocht Kommissje’ (Afûk) is a private foundation and teaches courses meant for adults to learn Frisian understanding, reading, speaking and writing. An overview of the language choice is lacking in other forms of adult education and permanent education courses. However, the language is almost always Dutch and the supporting materials also. That should change. Provincial language research from 2015 indicates that 93% of the Frisian population can understand Frisian reasonably to good. For reading the percentage is 51%. Especially writing

illiteracy is an obstacle to the use of Frisian in courses. Rightly that in the 5th periodic report on the functioning of the Charter learning to read and write is called essential for the survival of a language.

**Conclusion:** The result of several centuries of neglecting education in Frisian is that social participation in Frisian is frustrated. With a certain automatism Dutch is used for adult education and training in the Frisian language area. This vicious circle (use of Dutch, not sufficient language skills in Frisian, choice for Dutch, etc.) can be broken by a policy of encouraging the use of Frisian, in with education has a conditional task, namely to ensure that all the inhabitants of Fryslân at least are able to understand and read Frisian.

#### **Article 8, 1, g**

Since the 19th century the teaching materials are in Dutch and thus also the history methods are written in Dutch. The content of history education has been developed from the viewpoint of the centralized unitary state, in the Netherlands the Dutch vision c.q. the vision of Holland. The history of the Frisian people before, during and after the Dutch Republic (1579-1795) are not addressed systematically in the Frisian schools.

In the first decade of the 21st century a Frisian 'canon' of Frisian history and culture is designed to complement the national 'canon'. The Provincial Executive ('Gedeputeerde Staten') ordered after the appearance of the 'Canon of the Netherlands' ('De Canon van Nederland', 2006) for a Frisian canon: 'The kanon fan de skiednis fan Fryslân yn 11 and 30 finsters' (2008).

A major problem is the implementation, because of the relatively small Frisian language area hardly integrated Frisian material is developed for history education at student level. Teachers in primary and secondary education need to develop for themselves and their pupils/students.

**Conclusion:** The development of the Frisian 'canon' in addition to the 'Canon of the Netherlands' enables the Frisian schools to teach the history and culture, which is reflected by the Frisian language. However, the 'tradition' of history education from a national (= Dutch, 'Hollands') point of view cannot be changed easily. The initial presentations (a canon caravan and a TV production) are not sufficient to ensure a full and proper place of Frisian history integrated into school. The training of primary school teachers and history teachers in secondary education will have to give structural attention to this integrated approach. The developed teaching materials for the Dutch education market is not appropriate, because the Frisian component is missing. Central government and the province must provide multilingual (digital) teaching material for integrated teaching of history in the province of Fryslân and the Frisian people ('Frisia'). Thus also attention for the Frisian history stretching across the German border.

#### **Article 8, 1, h**

In the 2010 inspection report can be read, that in 2009 only half of primary school teachers have a competence for Frisian. Without enough well trained teachers not only the teaching of Frisian as a subject will be under pressure, but above all multilingual education is, where Frisian is one of the languages of instruction, very difficult. The two Frisian teacher training colleges have an obligation to offer Frisian, but students are not obliged to obtain a qualification in Frisian. The primary schools in Fryslân are not obliged to take on a responsibility for Frisian as function demand in the appointment policy.

Elementary school teachers, who are trained outside of Fryslân and have no competence for Frisian, are not legally required to follow a training for this subject, although the management of the

respective Frisian primary school can ask of her staff to do so. To provide for Frisian as a subject the teacher needs jurisdiction.

Since 2011, the Frisian Colleges ('Stenden' and 'Noordelijke Hogeschool Leeuwarden'/NHL) give students the opportunity to attend additional classes in language and language acquisition for the trilingual stream, with internship at a trilingual school. This trilingual stream ('3TS') is offered in addition to the regular training program, where Frisian – unlike the trilingual elementary school – is not used structurally and only incidentally as instruction language in other subjects.

The NHL teacher training students are required to follow Frisian in the first two years, with a section on multilingualism in the third year. Students who choose the trilingual stream must acquire the competence for Frisian. These are small numbers of students. In 2014 eight (8) Stenden students passed the exam for the trilingual stream ('3TS'). It still seems very difficult to use Frisian partly as a language of instruction in other subjects. The programs for Dutch, Frisian and English are still taught separately without the use of contrastive analysis (comparing similarities and differences between the languages) with a view to different languages of instruction (translanguaging).

The state inspection report (2010) mentions that half of the secondary schools the teachers for Frisian don't have a first- or second-degree jurisdiction. The report provides no insight into the knowledge of Frisian of teachers in other disciplines.

The NHL offers training for teachers of Frisian in secondary education. The demand for teachers of Frisian in secondary schools is very limited, because the requirement *ignores* Frisian as a language of instruction. Recently, a very small number of schools for secondary education uses Frisian as instruction language in other subjects (usually two courses). The current trend of multilingual education by the greatly increased demand for English as the language of secondary education could be also beneficial for Frisian as instructional language in other subjects, but the reverse is already noticeable in some schools: English as the medium of instruction in many subjects and Frisian not.

**Conclusion:** In the aforementioned 5<sup>th</sup> report on the Charter an important issue is mentioned, namely the lack of qualified teachers in primary and secondary education. With the remark that 'Rijk en provincie deze zorgen delen' ('government and the province share these concerns') this section is closed immediately. The question can be asked whether there will be (developed) policy to strengthen the training for Frisian in education. The permissiveness regarding sufficient and qualified staff for teaching in Frisian – both as a subject and as a language of instruction – partly explains the bad position of Frisian in elementary and secondary education as indicated in the successive inspection reports. That position of basic and further training should no longer be a free case. There is a need for a qualified application of the accepted parts of Article 8 (a-g) of the Charter. It should no longer be a free issue. Especially for a well-functioning trilingual primary and secondary education and/or multilingual education, all teachers in Fryslân has to be qualified for Frisian. The multilingual education can not succeed when multilingualism structurally has no place in the training of teaching staff.

### **Article 8.1, i**

As a result of the 'Wet gebruik Friese taal' (01-01- 2014) the 'Consultatief Orgaan Fries' the is replaced by the 'Orgaan voor de Friese Taal', an agency for reporting on the needs and wishes regarding Frisian in relation to the European Charter and the Framework Convention. It advises advising on the establishment and implementation of the 'Bestuursafpraak Friese Taal en Cultuur'

(‘Covenant on the Frisian Language and Culture’) and gives support in the drafting of rules and policies (‘beleidsplannen’) for in Fryslân established governing bodies and local government bodies. It ‘Orgaan voor de Friese taal’ has the task of promoting the equal position of Frisian and Dutch in the province of Fryslân. The language law is aimed at embedding the use of Frisian in administrative matters and legal matters.

So the ‘Orgaan’ is involved in scaling up the judiciary and the Makkinga-case, where the operation of the language law on formal grounds is counteracted as much as possible.

**Conclusion:** The establishment of an Agency for the Frisian language by the language law is a good thing. Nevertheless, in 2015 the body had to observe that despite the agreements at provincial, national and European level, there is still a lacking compliance with the language law. Also according the ‘Orgaan’ is nationally not sufficiently taken into account the letter and the spirit of the language law.

### **Overall summary and conclusions**

Over time there has been created legislation for Frisian in certain areas. But the grown Dutch ‘tradition’ in public life makes it difficult to abandon its dominant position in favor of the Frisian. Although repeatedly professed there is no equivalence between the two languages. The inhabitants of Fryslân are expected to master Dutch both oral and written, while command of Frisian has no priority. The regulations for Frisian is therefore not systematically observed and enforcement is not involved. The Dutch language community will not accept responsibility for the Frisian language and culture and that setting is reflected by the Frisian speakers. They ‘learn’ from an early age that not Frisian, but Dutch is important to obtain a good position in society.

That is also the case in education. All (Frisian-speaking) children should speak Dutch perfectly, while in schools Frisian - depending on the attitude of administration, teachers and students - is not or scarcely taught. The inspection of the quality of education in Frisian in primary and secondary education give a report. At the same time, the Inspectorate contributed to this ‘subordination’. All attention is given to the standardized results of the Dutch language and arithmetic. In many cases, a Frisian-unfriendly inspector advised for the purposes of assessing the ‘education’ of the school, not to pay attention to Frisian. A consultancy, which already can be found in the first Frisian education almanac of 1816: do not tolerate especially ‘vriesch boersch’ (‘countrified Frisian’) in the schools.

In this age of globalization Frisian is threatened of disappearance: first qualitatively by insufficient education and later quantitatively as living cultural language. However, if the European Charter is really going to be respected, there is hope for future. The FFU urges the Committee of Experts therefore persuading the Dutch government of its responsibility for the Frisian language and community. To take care of sufficient legislation and enforcement on Frisian as a second national language. Article 8 of the European Charter gives concrete impetus for policies in education.

*drs. Th. Dijkstra, chairman FFU*

*drs. S.T. Hiemstra, secretary FFU*

**Attachment:** *FFU-letter to the Committee of Experts of the European Charter d.d. January 24, 2012*