



The Dutch letter and its English translation (below) is also sent to:

- Council of Europe

Secretariat of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
Directorate General IV – Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France

- Council of Europe

Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France

- European Parliament

Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages
Secretariat: Dr. Davyth Hicks
ASP 12E 154
B-1047 Rue Wiertz 60
Bruxelles/Brussels, Belgium

From:

the **Frisian Education Association**

111027[5]

Secretary: S.T. Hiemstra M.A.

Address: 29 G. Sondermanstrjitte

9203 PT DRACHTEN

Netherlands

To:

the Members of the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament

esp.: the permanent committee of Education, Culture & Sciences

P.O. Box 20.018, 2500 EA THE HAGUE, Netherlands

Subjects: (1) application of the European Charter; (2) financing a pupil follow system and interim and final tests of Frisian; (3) inspector's checking of education in Frisian (as a subject & as a medium of instruction)

Drachten/Itens, September 27, 2011

Right Honourable Members of Parliament,

1. Our correspondence with Government authorities concerning the application of the European Charter

It was in August 14, 2009 that we, the *Frisian Education Association* addressed to the Second Chamber regarding the so far inadequate application of the Dutch signed *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992) about the Frisian Language (*European Charter*, for short). That letter was a follow-up of our epistle of September 15, 2008 (including a detailed annex on secondary vocational training). Our letter of August 24, 2009 was discussed on Sept. 10, 2009 by the permanent committee for Education, Culture and Sciences (ECS) in the procedure meeting (letters marked resp. 2008Z02602-2008D07244 and 2009Z15487/2009D41373). The committee promised: 'After receiving the response of the ministers of Education and Interior Affairs our committee will inform you if they will take further steps and if so, which'. But a response of the committee concerning 'further steps' has not appeared up to now, unfortunately.

On December 18, 2008 we only received a very disappointing reply of the Secretary of State of ECS, Mrs Sharon A.M. Dijkma, to our letter of Sept., 15, 2008 (marked PO/O&O77989) as Frisian education belonged to her portfolio. E.g., in her answer Mrs Dijkma did **not** announce that a legal and statutory obligation is to come for teaching in Frisian as a medium for instruction in schools of primary and secondary education. Now this is contrary to the European Charter. Its articles 8(1) a. *ii*; b. *ii*; c. *ii* and *iii*; d. *ii* and *iii* (including pre-school education, special (secondary) education and vocational training) should be inserted and integrated into Dutch legislative, uncurtailed. Only this may and will lead to the effect that in the schools concerned a 'substantial part' of education will be taught in the Frisian language.

The *equivalence* of Frisian to Dutch (as a subject, language of instruction and obligatory subject of examination) for Frisian pupils requires it too. It is necessary to give Frisian as the culture language of the single recognized national minority in the Netherlands (based on the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, 1995) a fair future.

As appears from the coalition agreement, conducted recently, the Deputy States (= provincial governors) of Fryslân aim at the status that in the new languages law ('Law on the use of Frisian'). Dutch and Frisian in the province of Fryslân will apply as equivalent languages in equal rights in all fields of society. This also means that for Frisian education there should be a continuous line of policy up to academic education. Then, in the course of time, Frisian as an examination subject in Fryslân in all secondary schools will have the same (obligatory) legal status for pupils as (obligatory) Dutch in examinations. The *steering committee on decentralizing Frisian from the national government to the province of Fryslân* (comm. Hoekstra) gave advice in its report *Frisian in education; more room, guidance and account for the province of Fryslân* (Ministry of Interior Affairs and Kingdom relations, Aug. 2010). The cabinet response (June 30, 2011) - for instance in the paragraph 'It can be better. It must be better!' - does **not** state the authority on obligation should be in the province of Fryslân in future. So it may and must be much better yet. In our opinion this means, that The Hague (= the Dutch government) should take its responsibility for Frisian education, while the authority on obligation has not been transferred to the province of Fryslân.

2. A pupil follow system and methodically independent testing of Frisian as a subject and the role of the inspectorate

Meanwhile last year an other report was published by the Inspectorate of Education, a report on the quality of the subject Frisian in primary and secondary school *Between Ideal and Reality* (Oct. 2010). The inspectors state, that the main or core objectives for the subject Frisian are insufficiently translated into control objectives for different groups and therefore the mastery of different Frisian language skills cannot be determined.

The inspectorate has declared, that it cannot and will not investigate the quality of Frisian education, if no standardized test system or pupil follow system has been developed for primary and secondary education.

In paragraph 9.3. (p. 57) of the inspection report there is a recommendation **not** to inspect Frisian for the time being. This is undesirable for two reasons:

- In the first place the inspectorate has the obligation to do so under the above mentioned European Charter. The Inspectorate of Education should effectively survey the teaching of Frisian. This does *not* undo the need for an effective working pupil follow system and a method-independent testing as soon as possible.
- Secondly Frisian schools will interpret this advice as a signal that the subject Frisian does not matter any more. The pointer not to inspect Frisian for the present will cause an unwanted situation and will injure the quality of the subject Frisian even more.

It appears from its view of June 30, 2011 regarding the report of the education inspectorate and the report of the steering group Hoekstra, the cabinet seems to be willing to invest in tests of Frisian.

On account of this view a valid, objective and reliable pupil follow system with method-independent (interim and final) tests for primary and secondary schools should be developed, as soon as possible.

But these tests cannot be made by 'the market' because it is far too limited and commercially not relevant enough. The steering group Hoekstra have remarked this and therefore advises the government to meet this need, so differently as in other subjects.

Therefore we urgently require the Second Chamber of Parliament to press the national government to its responsibility in this case and to supply adequate financial means.

Yours faithfully,

T. Dijkstra, M.A.,
president of FFU

and S. T. Hiemstra, M.A.,
secretary of FFU