

# aksjegroep Te Mâl

06-41284993, aksje-temal@hotmail.com, www.temal.tk

The Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages  
v/ Herr Sigve Gramstad  
Eigarskapstilsynet  
Ovre Slottsgate 29  
N - 0157 OSLO  
Noarwegen

Subject: implementation of the Charter in the Netherlands

Ljouwert, 10 May 2005

Kjære herr Gramstad, dear members of the Committee,

Action Group Te Mâl strives for an equal position of Frisian and Dutch in education in the Netherlands' province of Frisia. We have recently entreated Frisia's provincial parliament, Provinsjale Steaten fan Fryslân, to advise the Dutch Minister of Education, Mrs. Maria van der Hoeven, to maintain the system of equal educational targets for both provincial languages in primary education. In March, the Provinsjale Steaten have complied with our request and advised the Minister to uphold the formally established equal position of Dutch and Frisian in primary schools. We have also requested the Minister herself to maintain this equality. You will find a copy of our letter as attachment 1.

We wish to inform you about the reply we received from Minister Van der Hoeven, in which she makes clear that she will not follow the Frisian parliament's advice. A copy of her letter to us can be found in attachment 2. The Minister informs us that she intends to implement a new system of educational targets for Frisian and Dutch. The targets for Frisian would be less ambitious than those for Dutch and, contrary to the targets for Dutch, would not be obligatory, since schools will be allowed to decide for themselves which targets for Frisian they wish to apply. No such freedom exists for other subjects in Dutch primary education. In your last report, you referred to this plan as a "serious step backwards", which could "further weaken the position of Frisian in primary schools."

In her reply, the Minister refers to a report on the position of Frisian in primary education, published by the Netherlands' School Inspectorate. The Minister states that many schools consider the present system of equal targets for Frisian and Dutch unrealistic. No reference is made by the Minister to factors like lacking educational skills and teaching materials, and insufficient use of teaching time spent on Frisian, which the Inspectorate's report mentions as possible causes of the bad results in Frisian. By giving schools more freedom to choose their own targets for Frisian instead of trying to improve Frisian education, we fear the Minister is legalising the widespread refusal among school teachers to take seriously the rights of Frisian speakers to be educated in their mother tongue.

In our letter we have furthermore asked the Minister to implement the use of Frisian as a language of instruction in primary schools, by prescribing that it be used as a language of instruction during approximately the same amount of time as Dutch. Presently, the primary education act states that Dutch is the language of instruction in primary education, and in areas where Frisian or regional languages are in use, these are also allowed as languages of instruction. We have referred the Minister to the obligation under article 8 in chapter 3 of the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, and pointed out to her that by assenting to our request, the Netherlands would finally comply with this obligation. In its past reports on the implementation of the Charter in the Netherlands, your Committee has pointed out that so far this is not the case.

In her letter to us, the Minister states that she will not satisfy our request. She answers (our translation): *Thirdly, you ask me to set by law that Dutch and Frisian be used as languages of instruction during a comparable amount of time. Apart from the question if such a legal provision is possible, I see no necessity to do so. Schools have been given by law the possibility to use Frisian as a language of instruction during their teaching. It is the school's responsibility to make proper use of this legal possibility.*

We interpret this quotation from the Minister's reply as a blunt refusal to comply with the obligation in article 8, chapter 3 of the Charter.

We would be grateful if you would take our letter into account in the next monitoring cycle.

Med vennlig hilsen/Mei freonlike groetnis/Kind regards,

Elbrecht Claus  
chairwoman of Te Mâl

Attachments: 2

C.c.: Secretariat of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Minister Maria van der Hoeven, Minister Johan Remkes, Provinsjale Steaten fan Fryslân, Konsultatyf Orgaan, Secretariat of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, press