
2010 Brussels Declaration on Sign Languages in the European Union

PREAMBLE

We, the representatives of the National Associations of the Deaf of the Member States of the European Union and the affiliated members, Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland believe in and strive for equal rights of Deaf and Hard of Hearing sign language users. We adopt the following declaration by mutual agreement and by full acclamation today as the closing of the conference entitled "Implementation of Sign Language Legislation" hosted by Dr Ádám Kósa, Member of the European Parliament and the European Union of the Deaf (EUD).

PRINCIPLES

1. The treaties and principles of the European Union and the regulations laid down in the Charter of Fundamental Rights make us - Deaf and Hard of Hearing sign language users - equal citizens of the European Union, with the right to free movement.
2. Deaf and Hard of Hearing people in Europe are the users and preservers of many indigenous national sign languages and form vulnerable communities equal to other linguistic and cultural minorities.
3. The indigenous national sign languages of the Member States are the native languages of sign language users. It has long been verified by research that sign languages are fully-fledged languages with their own grammar and syntax in the same way as spoken languages. They serve all practical and theoretical purposes of a natural language, including age appropriate language acquisition in infants and children.
4. One of the pillars of the community of sign language users is Deaf Culture. As such, it constitutes an integral part of the cultures of the Member States, and must therefore be protected and promoted nationally and regionally.
5. Every sign language user must have the right to use their native sign language without restriction and discrimination. Communicating and using a native language is a fundamental human right.
6. Sign language users must have equal access to public life, education, and employment. Full participation must be promoted and protected through legislation. Sign language interpreters (in person or via modern, tailored IT solutions) are one way to assist sign language users in gaining full access.
7. The European Union must support its Member States to take the necessary legal measures to protect and promote the national sign languages to meet the objectives of the EU2020 strategy, which aims to increase employment and living standards within the European Union.

SIGN LANGUAGES IN USE

We call upon the European Union and its Member States to take all legal measures necessary to secure that in consultation with the Deaf Community:

- a. The national sign languages are recognised on an equal footing with the respective spoken languages of the Member States;
- b. Signing communities and their individual members are able to use their language without restriction;

- c. Sign language tuition is provided to family members to ensure the Deaf or Hard of Hearing's child full participation in family life;
- d. Deaf and Hard of Hearing sign language users have the right to learn a sign language and learn/study bilingually, in their sign language and the written national language(s);
- e. Sign language users have access to public services in their national sign language;
- f. Sign language users are treated equally in employment;
- g. The national sign languages and their communities are protected and promoted;
- h. The provision of sign language interpretation services, including the financing and training of sign language interpreters is secured by developing and adopting minimum standards for all Member States of the European Union.

We especially urge the Member States of the European Union to secure equal opportunities by providing accessible educational options for sign language users. Teachers must be trained to become fully bilingual, while native sign language users should be preferred. This is necessary to ensure appropriate education for each Deaf or Hard of Hearing child.

We trust that the European Union Member States, including Iceland, Norway and Switzerland have the will and means to actively support the use of sign languages.

We are fully aware that both the United Nations and the Council of Europe have passed relevant documents on the matters presented in this Declaration.

We recall the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Recommendation 1598 (2003) on the Protection of Sign Languages in the Member States of the Council of Europe.

We herewith remind the institutions of the European Union – particularly the European Commission and the European Parliament – of two Resolutions by the European Parliament on Sign Languages (Doc A2-302/87 of 17 June 1988 and Doc B4-095/98 of 18 November 1998).

We request the European Institutions to develop laws, issue directives and support the development of horizontal legislation.

We call upon the European Union to provide sign language interpretation services within its institutions to model best practice.

We ask the European Union to request all Member States to make contributions to sign language research, development, and teaching by providing financial assistance and by launching and supporting national and local projects.

We entrust Dr Ádám Kósa, Member of the European Parliament and the European Union of the Deaf to forward this Declaration to the institutions of the European Union and its Member States.

Signed by

- Dr Ádám Kósa, Member of the European Parliament;
- President of the European Union of the Deaf;
- The representatives of the National Associations of the Deaf of the Member States of the European Union and the affiliated members, Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland;
- President of the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters;
- President of the World Federation of the Deaf;
- President of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters

in Brussels on 19 November 2010.