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Federal Act on the National Languages and Understanding between the Linguistic Communities (Languages Act, LangA)

of 5 October 2007 (Status as 1 February 2021)

The Federal Assembly of the Swiss Confederation,
based on Articles 4, 18 and 70 of the Federal Constitution¹,
having considered the report of the National Council Science, Education and Culture
Committee dated 15 September 2006²
and the report of the Federal Council dated 18 October 2006³,
decrees:

Section 1 General Provisions

Art. 1 Subject matter

This Act regulates:

- a. the use of the official languages by the federal authorities and in dealings with them;
- b. the promotion of understanding and exchange between the linguistic communities;
- c. support for the plurilingual cantons in fulfilling their specific tasks;
- d. support for measures by the cantons of Graubünden and Ticino that benefit Romansh and Italian.

Art. 2 Aim

By means of this Act, the Confederation intends:

- a. to strengthen quadrilingualism as one of Switzerland's fundamental characteristics;

AS 2009 6605

¹ SR 101

² BBl 2006 8977

³ BBl 2006 9047

- b. to consolidate the internal cohesion of the country;
- c. to encourage individual and institutional plurilingualism in the national languages;
- d. to preserve and promote Romansh and Italian as national languages.

Art. 3 Principles

¹ In fulfilling its tasks, the Confederation shall observe the following principles in particular:

- a. it shall ensure that it treats the four national Swiss languages equally;
- b. it shall guarantee and apply linguistic freedom in all its areas of activity;
- c. it shall take account of the traditional linguistic composition of Switzerland's regions;
- d. it shall promote understanding between the linguistic communities.

² It shall work with the cantons to fulfil its tasks relating to the policy on languages and understanding between the linguistic communities.

Section 2 Official Languages of the Confederation

Art. 4 Scope of application

¹ This section applies to the following federal authorities:

- a. the Federal Assembly and its organs;
- b. the Federal Council;
- c. the Federal Administration under Article 2 paragraphs 1–3 of the Government and Administration Organisation Act of 21 March 1997⁴ (GAOO);
- d. the federal courts;
- e. the extra-parliamentary committees of the Confederation.

² Where the goals set out in this Act so require, the Federal Council may provide that:

- a. provisions of this Section apply to organisations or persons under Article 2 paragraph 4 GAOO that are entrusted with administrative tasks under federal law;
- b. the granting of licences or assignments and the award of financial assistance are made conditional on complying with the provisions of this Section.

Art. 5 Official languages

¹ The official languages of the Confederation are German, French and Italian. Romansh is an official language in dealings with persons who speak this language.

² The federal authorities shall use the official languages in their standard forms.

Art. 6 Choice of language

¹ Any person dealing with a federal authority may do so in the official language of their own choice.

² The federal authorities shall answer in the official language in which they are addressed. They may agree with persons who contact them to use a different official language.

³ Persons who speak Romansh may address the federal authorities in its idioms or in Rumantsch Grischun. The authorities answer in Rumantsch Grischun.

⁴ The Federal Council may restrict the free choice of official language for dealings with authorities whose activities are limited to a specific region.

⁵ In dealings with persons who have no command of an official language, the federal authorities shall if possible use a language that these persons understand.

⁶ The special provisions on the administration of federal justice are reserved.

Art. 7 Comprehensibility

¹ The federal authorities shall endeavour to ensure that their language is appropriate, clear and comprehensible and shall ensure that gender-appropriate wording is used.

² The Federal Council shall take the measures required; in particular, it shall arrange for the basic and advanced training of employees and the provision of the required aids.⁵

Art. 8 Federal Assembly

¹ In debates in the Federal Assembly and its committees, each member shall use a national language of his or her choice.

² Dispatches, reports, draft legislation and requests must normally be submitted for consideration in the Federal Assembly and its committees in German, French and Italian.

Art. 9 Federal Council and Federal Administration

¹ The members of the Federal Council, the Federal Chancellor and Federal Administration staff shall work as they wish in German, French or Italian.

⁵ The amendment in accordance with the FA of 20 June 2014 on Continuing Education and Training, in force since 1 Jan. 2017, relates to the French and Italian versions only (AS 2016 689; BBl 2013 3729).

² Federal Administration employers as defined in the legislation on federal personnel shall make the required aids available.

Art. 10 Publications in German, French and Italian

¹ Federal enactments and other texts that must be published officially in the Official or Classified Compilations of Federal Legislation or in the Federal Gazette in terms of the Publications Act of 18 June 2004⁶ or based on other federal law provisions shall be published in German, French and Italian unless the law provides otherwise.⁷

² Publication shall take place simultaneously in German, French and Italian.

Art. 11 Publications in Romansh

Texts of particular importance as well as the documents for federal elections and votes shall also be published in Romansh. The Federal Chancellery shall determine which texts are published after consulting the Chancellery of the Canton of Graubünden and the federal agencies concerned.

Art. 12 Communications, signs and identity documents

¹ The federal authorities shall use the local official language for public communications.

² The federal authorities shall communicate with the public in the four official languages, in particular in the design:

- a. of its printed matter;
- b. of its internet home pages;
- c. in signs in its buildings.

³ Personal identity documents shall be issued in the four official languages.

⁴ Federal forms intended for the general public must be made available in all the official languages. The federal authorities may allow exceptions for forms intended for a limited group of persons.

Art. 13 International agreements

¹ An original version of bilateral agreements that must be published must be made available in at least one official language of the Confederation.

² In the case of multilateral agreements that must be published, it must be ensured that an original version in at least one official language of the Confederation is produced.

³ Exceptions under Article 14 paragraph 2 of the Publications Act of 18 June 2004⁸ and special provisions of federal legislation are reserved.

⁶ SR 170.512

⁷ Amended by Annex No 5 of the FA of 26 Sept. 2014, in force since 1 Jan. 2016 (AS 2015 3977; BBl 2013 7057).

⁸ SR 170.512

Section 3 Promoting Understanding and Exchange between the Linguistic Communities

Art. 14 Student exchange schemes

¹ The Confederation and the cantons shall encourage the exchange of school students and teachers at all school levels.

² The Confederation may grant financial assistance to the cantons and exchange organisations.

Art. 15 Teaching

¹ The Confederation and the cantons shall, within the scope of their responsibilities, ensure that the teaching language, and in particular its standard form, is accorded special attention at all academic levels.

² They shall, within the scope of their responsibilities, encourage plurilingualism among learners and teachers.

³ They shall, within the scope of their responsibilities, be committed to a system of teaching foreign languages that guarantees that at the end of their compulsory schooling, students have skills in at least one second national language and one other foreign language. The teaching of the national languages shall take account of the cultural aspects of a plurilingual country.

Art. 16 Further measures to promote language skills

The Confederation may grant financial assistance to the cantons to:

- a. devise the basic requirements for the teaching of a second and third national language;
- b. promote skills in the local national language among those who speak a different language;
- c. promote the skills of those who speak a different language in their own mother tongue.

Art. 17 Academic institution promoting plurilingualism

In order to coordinate, introduce and conduct applied research on languages and plurilingualism, the Confederation and the cantons may support an academic institution suitable for this purpose.

Art. 18 Support for organisations

The Confederation may grant financial assistance to:

- a. news agencies of national importance that report on the four language regions of the country;

- b. non-profit-making organisations and institutions of national importance that by their activities promote understanding in at least one language region or carry out fundamental work promoting plurilingualism and publish the results;
- c. joint bodies that support projects that increase understanding between the linguistic communities.

Art. 19 Financial assistance for translation work

The Confederation may grant financial assistance to non-profit-making organisations and institutions active in Switzerland for written translations from one official Swiss language into the others.

Art. 20 Plurilingualism in public service

¹ The Confederation shall encourage its employees to further their knowledge of the national languages.

² The Confederation shall ensure that the linguistic communities are fairly represented in the federal authorities and extra-parliamentary committees, and shall encourage plurilingualism in the armed forces.

³ The Confederation and the cantons shall make their terminology databases available to each other free of charge.

Section 4 Support for Plurilingual Cantons

Art. 21

¹ Within the limits of the authorised credits, the Confederation shall grant the plurilingual cantons financial assistance so that they may perform their specific tasks.

² The cantons of Bern, Fribourg, Graubünden and Valais are considered to be plurilingual.

³ Specific tasks are in particular:

- a. establishing suitable conditions and aids for the plurilingual work in political authorities, the law enforcement and justice system, and administrative authorities;
- b. encouraging plurilingualism among learners and teachers in the official languages of the canton at all academic levels.

Section 5 Preserving and Promoting the Romansh and Italian Languages and Cultures

Art. 22

¹ Within the limits of the authorised credits, the Confederation shall grant the cantons of Graubünden and Ticino financial assistance to support:

- a. measures to preserve and promote the Romansh and Italian languages and cultures;
- b. organisations and institutions that fulfil supra-regional responsibilities to preserve and promote the Romansh and Italian languages and cultures;
- c. publishing activities in Romansh and Italian-speaking Switzerland.

² In order to preserve and promote the Romansh language, the Confederation may support measures to support the Romansh media.

³ Federal financial assistance shall amount to a maximum of 75 per cent of the overall costs.

Section 6 Implementation and Evaluation

Art. 23 Granting of financial assistance

¹ The Confederation shall grant financial assistance in response to an application. Applications must provide information on the intended measures and include a funding plan.

² The Confederation shall grant financial assistance in the form of a public service agreement or a ruling. If possible, public service agreements shall be entered into for a term of several years.

Art. 24 Prohibition of multiple grants

Multiple grants of financial assistance under this Act are not permitted.

Art. 25 Reporting, evaluation and statistics⁹

¹ The cantons, organisations and institutions shall submit regular reports to the Confederation on the use of financial assistance grants.

² The Confederation shall regularly review the utility and effectiveness of the measures.

⁹ Amended by No I of the FA of 25 Sept. 2020, in force since 1 Feb. 2021 (AS 2021 48; BBl 2020 3131).

³ It shall with the assistance of the cantons compile statistics on student exchange schemes under Article 14. The cantons shall provide the Confederation with the required data in a standardised form.¹⁰

Section 7 Final Provisions

Art. 26 Repeal and amendment of existing legislation

The repeal and amendment of the existing legislation are regulated in the Annex.

Art. 27 Referendum and commencement

¹ This Act is subject to an optional referendum.

² The Federal Council shall determine the commencement date.

Commencement date:¹¹ 1 January 2010

Number I of the Annex comes into force at the same time as the Languages Ordinance.

¹⁰ Inserted by No I of the FA of 25 Sept. 2020, in force since 1 Feb. 2021 (AS **2021** 48; BBl **2020** 3131).

¹¹ FCD of 4 Dec. 2009.

Annex
(Art. 26)

Repeal and amendment of current legislation

I

The Federal Act of 6 October 1995¹² on Financial Assistance for the Preservation and Promotion of the Romansh and Italian Languages and Cultures is repealed.

II

The following federal acts are amended as follows:

...¹³

¹² [AS 1996 2280 2514]

¹³ The amendments may be consulted under AS 2009 6605

