

Parliament, government and publications

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Article 7 requires the federal authorities to use appropriate, clear and comprehensible language and to ensure gender-appropriate wording. The Federal Council must arrange training and provide the required aids.¹ Article 8 governs the Federal Assembly. In debates in the Assembly and its committees each member uses a national language of his or her choice. Dispatches, reports, draft legislation and requests must normally be submitted in German, French and Italian.² Article 9 provides that the members of the Federal Council, the Federal Chancellor and the staff of the Federal Administration shall work as they wish in German, French or Italian, and that the employers shall make the required aids available.³ The last rule is ambitious. It means that an Italian-speaking official in Bern may in principle draft his memoranda in Italian. Whether colleagues and superiors are able to read them is a different question, to which the representation statistics give a sobering answer.

Article 10 deals with publications. Federal enactments and other texts that must be published officially in the Official or Classified Compilations of Federal Legislation or in the Federal Gazette shall be published in German, French and Italian unless the law provides otherwise, and publication shall take place simultaneously in the three languages.⁴ The provision mirrors Article 14 of the Publications Act, examined later in this chapter. Article 12 requires the federal authorities to use the local official language for public communications, to communicate with the public in the four official languages in printed matter, on their internet home pages and on signs in their buildings, to issue identity documents in the four official languages and to make forms for the general public available in all official languages.⁵ Article 13 requires that an original version of bilateral agreements that must be published be available in at least one official language of the Confederation, which in practice often means that treaties with Italy exist in an authentic Italian version.⁶

1 Understanding, schools and the plurilingual cantons

The second part of the Act concerns understanding between the language communities. Article 15 obliges the Confederation and the cantons to accord special attention to the teaching language and its standard form at all levels, to encourage plurilingualism among learners and teachers, and to support a system of foreign language teaching that guarantees that at the end of compulsory schooling students have skills in at least one second national language and one other foreign language.⁷ Italian is a national language, but the Act does not require that it be taught as the second national language in German- or French-speaking cantons. In most of them the second national language is French or German, and Italian is offered at most as an optional subject. Article 17 authorizes the Confederation and the cantons to support an academic institution for applied research on languages and plurilingualism.⁸ The Languages Ordinance names the Institute of Multilingualism of the University and the University of Teacher Education of Fribourg as the recipient of this support and provides for a performance agreement between the institute and the Federal Office of Culture.

Article 20 requires the Confederation to encourage its employees to further their knowledge of the national languages and to ensure that the linguistic communities are fairly represented in the federal authorities and extra-parliamentary committees. Paragraph 3 obliges the Confederation and the cantons to make their terminology databases available to each other free of charge.⁹ Article 21 grants financial assistance to the plurilingual cantons, which the Act names as Bern, Fribourg, Graubünden and Valais.¹⁰ Article 22 is the provision for Italian. Within the limits of the authorized credits, the Confederation grants the cantons of Graubünden and Ticino financial assistance to support measures to preserve and promote the Romansh and Italian languages and cultures, organizations and institutions that fulfil supra-regional responsibilities for that purpose, and publishing activities in Romansh and Italianspeaking Switzerland. The federal contribution may amount to a maximum of 75 per cent of the overall costs.¹¹

2 Notes

1. LangA, Art. 7, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-7-10.html>. ↩
2. LangA, Art. 8, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-8-11.html>. ↩

3. LangA, Art. 9, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-9-12.html>. ↩
4. LangA, Art. 10, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-10-13.html>. ↩
5. LangA, Art. 12, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-12-15.html>. ↩
6. LangA, Art. 13, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-13-16.html>. ↩
7. LangA, Art. 15, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-15-18.html>. ↩
8. LangA, Art. 17, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-17-20.html>; Ordinance of 4 June 2010 on the National Languages and Understanding between the Linguistic Communities (Languages Ordinance, LangO), SR 441.11, Art. 12 paras. 1 and 2, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/de-it/4/44/441.11-12-19.html>. ↩
9. LangA, Art. 20, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-20-23.html>. ↩
10. LangA, Art. 21, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-21-24.html>. ↩
11. LangA, Art. 22, <https://www.droit-bilingue.ch/en-it/4/44/441.1-22-25.html>. ↩

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