

DECISION OF THE 1ST CONGRESS OF THE VÕRO PEOPLE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE VÕRO LANGUAGE, VÕRO-LANGUAGE EDUCATION, MEDIA, CULTURE AND PUBLIC USAGE OF THE VÕRO LANGUAGE

Adopted in the town of Võro, on 22 April, 2023

The Congress of the Võro People declares that the Võro language is an Indigenous language of Vana-Võromaa, an indigenous mother tongue of the Võro people and the principal foundation of the identity of the Võro people. The Congress emphasises that the Võro language is an Indigenous regional language that for the Võro people has equal importance with the Estonian language. The Võro language is not a dialect or regional variant of the Estonian language.

Explanation. According to linguistics, the Võro language is both today as well as historically a clearly different language from Estonian (see publications by Petri Kallio, Karl Pajusalu, Tapani Salminen). The Võro language is less distinct from other South Estonian languages but very clearly differs in terms of the speakers' identity. Internationally, the Võro language has been officially recognised as a separate language (ISO language code vro), but in Estonia so far has not. Based on academic research and UNESCO red book on endangered languages, the Võro language is today a seriously endangered language. For the preservation of the Võro language it is necessary for the state and municipalities to recognise it, to treat the Võro language more seriously than so far, and to offer greater support for it in education, media, culture and its public usage.

The call of the Congress for the recognition and support of the Võro language

The Congress of the Võro People calls on the Estonian state and municipalities of Vana-Võromaa to officially recognise the Võro language as an Indigenous regional language of Estonia. The Congress of the Võro People calls on the Estonian state and municipalities to clearly and assertively integrate the Võro language into language, educational, cultural and media policies and to urgently undertake at least the following measures to support the Võro language:

1. To treat the Võro language in the Language Act and Population Register as a distinct language and enable residents of Estonia to freely choose it as a mother tongue.
2. To reorganise all kindergartens and schools in Vana-Võromaa as well as some schools in Tartu and Tallinn (as the biggest destinations of domestic migration of the Võro people) for effective bilingual curriculum (at least 50 per cent of Võro as the language of instruction). For that, Võro-language teacher training, curricula and learning materials must be elaborated. Municipalities, schools, kindergartens, and development associations of Vana-Võromaa will conclude an agreement to implement this plan. The Võro language, its history and distinctiveness of Võro culture must also be highlighted more in the national Estonian-language curricula.
3. To increase the usage and reputation of the Võro language with the help of regular Võro-language media. To amend the Estonian Public Broadcasting Act so that one of the objectives of the Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR) would be to produce and disseminate TV and radio programmes as well as online content in the Võro language (but also other regional languages, e.g., Seto). To urgently initiate daily TV and radio news in the Võro language by ERR. In the longer term we expect ERR to establish a Võro-language TV and radio channel. To support the transition of the Võro-language newspaper Uma Leht into a weekly newspaper. To support daily broadcasting of Võro-language programmes and media content by commercial media channels.
4. To increase the usage and visibility of the Võro language in the public space. Let us encourage the municipalities of Vana-Võromaa (both institutions such as urban and rural municipalities, schools, kindergartens, cultural centres, village community centres, etc. as well as on the landscape) and state institutions to officially and publicly use Võro-language or Võro-Estonian bilingual place names (this is allowed by the current Place Names Act), signage, websites, marketing and information posters, etc. To support wide usage of Võro-language or Võro-Estonian bilingual signs, websites, commercial signs, ATMs and queueing machines, message boards, etc., by private enterprises (including shops, offices, banks, health care and service enterprises).
5. To support and encourage Võro-language culture, literature, theatre, filmmaking, and folklore. To support the establishment of at least one professional theatre with a

permanently Võro-language repertoire on the territory of Vana-Võromaa. To support cultural centres, village community centres, associations, choirs, folk and pop music groups and others to conduct cultural and civic life in the Võro language.

6. To acknowledge and pay salary premiums for state or municipality employees (teachers, civil servants, police, physicians, cultural workers, scientists, etc.) who understand the Võro language and use it daily in their work. To encourage private enterprises to do likewise for the support of the Võro language.

7. If some laws must be amended to implement the measures to support the Võro language, then this must be done.