

To the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention

Secretariat of the FCNM
F – 67075 Strasbourg Cedex
Fax: +33 (0)3 90 21 49 18
Tel: +33 (0)3 90 21 44 33
minorities.fcnm@coe.int

Copy to

To the Expert Committee of the European Charter

Council of Europe European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
DG II - Directorate of Human Rights and Anti-discrimination
Agora Building, 1 quai Jacoutot
F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France
minlang.secretariat@coe.int

**Ministries of
Culture,
Employment,
Education and
Rural Affairs**

Negative Developments in the Institutional Framework for Minority Rights in Sweden

As representatives of national minorities we wish to inform the Committees of an alarming negative development in Sweden. This development is contrary to what is needed in order to strengthen the minority languages in Sweden.

The Existing Institutional Framework is Weakening

One of the important issues discussed at the follow-up meeting with the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention in Stockholm on 11 April 2013 was the current legal and institutional frameworks for minority rights in Sweden. The national minorities voiced their concerns regarding weak or frail institutional frameworks that are to implement minority rights in Sweden. Some government agencies are unable or have great difficulties in fulfilling their obligations and tasks in the field of minority rights, in spite of directives from the Swedish Government. The main reasons for this are insufficient government funding, weak legislation and sometimes lack of awareness.

One of the examples of insufficient funding given at the meeting in Stockholm was the government agency the Institute for Language and Folklore. In spite of the fact that the Institute has argued for additional funding for years, adequate funding has not been granted so far – even though the number of tasks in the field of national minorities have increased the past few years. The national minorities have voiced their concerns on numerous occasions in the past. The most recent report from the Expert Committee of the European Charter discusses the need of continued work in the field of language planning and corpus building.¹ For two of the Swedish minority languages, Romani

¹ Report of the Committee of Experts on the Charter, Fourth monitoring cycle, 12 Oct 2011, ECRML(2001)4, para 133

and Meänkieli, the need for language planning is especially important because they are in the process of standardization.

The fears voiced at the follow-up meeting are now becoming reality. On 4 June 2013 the Institute for Language and Folklore informed its employees of upcoming planned cutbacks that will affect the national minorities and the national minority languages detrimentally. The reason for these cutbacks is lack of government funding. Different stakeholders, such as researchers, different local and regional museums and archives, local NGO:s that are working with DAUM and representatives of the Sami and Tornedalian community are now voicing their protests.

No consultations have taken place with the representatives of the national minorities concerned on these issues, nor has any prior information regarding these plans been provided by the Institute. No mention of the planned cutbacks was even made at the special consultation meeting on 18 April 2013 with the representatives of the national minorities, hosted by the Institute for Language and Folklore.

The national minorities have thus not been given the opportunity to be heard on the matter. This is in violation of Article 15 of the Framework Convention and Article 5 of the Swedish Act on National Minorities and Minority Languages.

The Institute and Its Importance

The Institute for Language and Folklore is a government agency with a focus on maintaining, preserving and mediating the immaterial cultural heritage, such as the knowledge on dialects, folklore, folk music, place-names and personal names. The Institute conducts research, answers questions and provides advice, and produces a range of publications. The Institute's collections, which document major components of Sweden's intangible cultural heritage, are open to members of the public, students and researchers. The Institute collects data in databases, registers and dictionaries of personal names and place-names, and also gives opinions on appropriate forms of place-names and in connection with the registration of personal names.

The Institute is responsible for language planning, or 'language cultivation', in the country, in particular with Swedish, Swedish Sign Language and the national minority languages (with the exception of the Sami languages). The Institute also analyses the language situation in society, monitors implementation of the Language Act, and encourages the use of "plain language" by public agencies.

The local office in Umeå, the Department of Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research (DAUM) has specialized on the two northernmost counties in Sweden, Västerbotten and Norrbotten. During the 1900s, large archives of material from Northern Sweden have been collected and donated to DAUM. DAUM has had archival research expertise in Sami materials since the 1970s and research expertise in Meänkieli since 2007. The only employees working full time with Meänkieli and with Sami languages at the Institute are placed in Umeå. The work with Meänkieli and Sami languages focuses on collection, documentation and research on the languages and the cultural heritage of the minority. The need for linguistic scientific analysis and descriptions of Meänkieli is increasing, since services on language consultation and recommendations on written Meänkieli are being planned as it already is in the case of Sami languages. Scientific research provides an important basis for such

language planning and the continued work that is now being performed at DAUM is therefore of utmost importance.

In 2006 the language planning in Finnish became a part of the Institute's responsibilities. At that time the Institute "adopted" the four employees working with language planning and language consultation from the previous private Finnish Language Board. Due to the difficult fiscal situation the Institute it now only has two employees for this task. One consequence of this is that the language planning journal in Finnish "Kieliviesti" that has been published four times a year has had to cut back to three issues a year from 2013. Since the government took over the task of language planning in Finnish in 2006 the development has been negative. This is *de facto* contrary to the Swedish Government's aims to promote and develop the Finnish language in Sweden. The need of language planning and language policy on the other hand has increased in Sweden during these years. The use of Finnish as an official language in the administrative areas has increased the need of advice and consultation. There is also greater need to follow the development of Finnish that is being used by government and municipal agencies. But the available personnel resources have diminished.

Consequences for the Minority Languages

A consequence of the currently planned cutbacks is that DAUM will be closed in 2014. The employees will most likely lose their jobs and the archives are to be moved to Uppsala.

This means that the large Sami and Meänkieli collections and archives will be moved from the geographical area that is part of the Sami administrative area and the traditional area for Meänkieli. The expertise of the employees that have worked with these valuable archives and collections will be lost. The geographical connection to the traditional Sami and Meänkieli areas is thus affected negatively when valuable cultural heritage is relocated.

The University of Umeå is the only university in the country that conducts research on Meänkieli and teaches Meänkieli. The University also teaches Sami and there is a research center for Sami studies. There is a close cooperation between the University and the Institute. Researchers and students use the archives for their research. If DAUM is closed and the archives are moved to Uppsala access to the valuable archives will be more difficult.

The Swedish Government made serious commitments in 2009 when it launched its new Minority Rights Policy. An important part of the strategy is to strengthen the preservation of the national minority languages. As representatives of the national minorities we are seriously concerned over the lack of coordination among government agencies and other government institutions. Such coordination is crucial for using available minority resources wisely and to be able to create environments where the national minority languages can flourish. In fact it should be in the interest of the Swedish Government to promote the national minority languages and the research of these at Umeå University and for that reason only continue the work of DAUM. There are previous examples of lack of coordination causing damage and lost opportunities in the field of minority issues. For instance, in September 2012 the Swedish Government decided, without consultation with the Tornedalians, that teacher training in Meänkieli should be located to University of Stockholm, far from the Meänkieli area, where Meänkieli is no longer being taught.

We now fear that we are seeing the same type of negative development due to lack of government funding and government coordination.

We therefore urge the monitoring bodies of the Council of Europe to carefully follow the current situation, so that Sweden's commitments under the Framework Convention and the European Language Charter will be fulfilled.

Mr. Markku Peura

Chairman, The Sweden Finnish Delegation/ Sverigefinländarnas Delegation / Ruotsinsuomalaisten valtuuskunta

Mr. Tore Hjorth

Chairman, National association of Swedish Tornedalians/ Svenska Tornedalingars Riksförbund - Tornionlaaksolaiset

Michael Lindblad

Chairman, Sâhkie/Umeå Sami Association

Ulla Barruk Sunna

Chairman, Álgguogâhtie regional Sami association