

The Outcome of the Minority and Language Policy in Sweden

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An important aspect of democracy concerns the treatment of national minorities and their position in society. It raises questions about their citizenship, influence in society, right to be treated in the same way, positive kind of favouritism and legal security, all examples of basic democratic values. The rights of minorities, as part of basic democratic values, is a relatively new issue to which there is no political agreement; neither concerning the principal issue of minority policy, nor concerning its implementation (Rawls 1971 & 1993; Dworkin 1977; Walzer 1983; Taylor 1985 & 1999; Kymlicka 1998).

From the middle of the 70s there was a radical change in the minority policy of Sweden, which followed in the wake of corresponding international changes. This change influenced the ethnic minorities in different ways. The main change was the introduction of immigrant language teaching and the recognition of the Sámi people as an indigenous people.¹ A similar development occurred in Norway and Finland.

There are five ethnic minorities in Sweden, which after the year 2000 were regarded as national minorities within the legal framework of the European Council. It is the *Sámi people*, *Sweden-Finns*, *Torne Valley people*, *Jews* and *Romany* (Hyltenstam 1997; Elenius 2006). The Sámi, Finnish and Swedish speakers have been living side by side in the county of Norrbotten since at least the 14th century, and in the case of the Sámi and Finns considerably longer. The Finno-Ugric minorities had a similar socio-economic status and have been dealing with the same kind of linguistic problems concerning contacts with authorities. The change in their minority status has caused a new kind of culture among authorities to develop. Another result is that the culture of minorities has exploded in postmodern expressions where old and new elements are mixed.

The immigrants from Finland, the Sweden-Finns, is the

largest group, followed by the Torne Valley people, see Table 1. This also reflects the different minority backgrounds within the nation state project of Sweden. In this article the Swedish case of the implementation of the European minority language legislation will be investigated. This will be done by taking a closer look at the influence that Swedish minority policy had on the implementation of minority legislation.

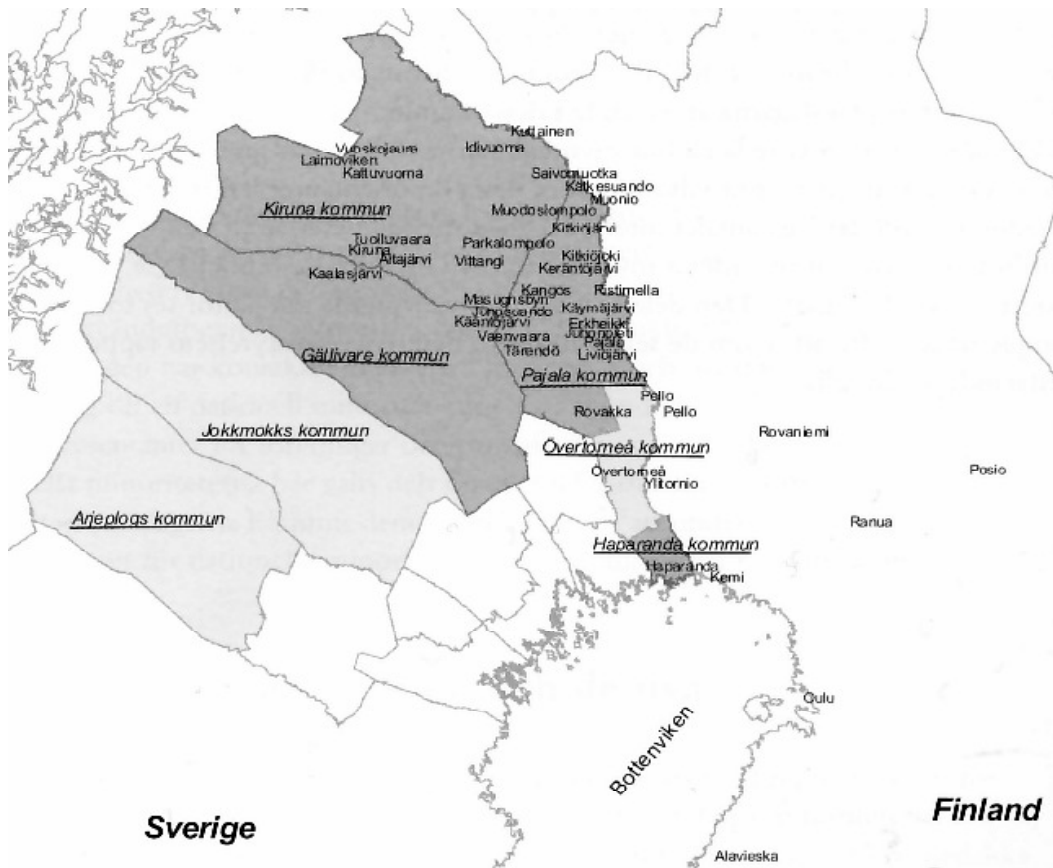
Minority	Estimated pop.
<i>Territorial minorities</i>	
Sami people	17 000–20 000
Sweden-Finns	450 000
Torne Valley people	50 000
<i>Non-territorial minorities</i>	
Jews	15 000–20 000
Romanies	15 000–20 000

Table 1. The national minorities of Sweden

(Source: KU 2004/05:RFR3. *Nationella minoriteter och minoritetsspråk*. Stockholm. (Rapport från Riksdagen)).

The five national minorities have different minority statuses. The Sámi people, Sweden-Finns and Torne Valley people all belong to the Finno-Ugric language group. They have a common history going back to the 13th century when the Swedish nation state was created as a centralised power. In the Swedish minority convention from the year 2000 they are categorised as “territorial minorities”, and the Jews and Romany as “non-territorial minorities”.

The territorial minorities have better protection for their languages than do the non-territorial minorities. Since the year 2000 two national laws concerning the use of Sámi, Finnish and Meänkieli² minority language are valid in Sweden. These are national laws, but only valid in some selected municipalities in the northernmost county of Norrbotten, see Map 1. The Finno-Ugric part of the population has always been very large in the



Map 1. The application of the minority language legislation in Norrbotten

county. They still occupy three fourths of the County of Norrbotten, as is shown on the map, even if the Swedes are a majority.

Source: Elenius & Ekenberg 2002. All grey coloured areas depict the municipalities in the county of Norrbotten where the minority language legislation is in use. The dark grey areas show municipalities involved in an investigation done by Luleå University of Technology in 2002. The place names signify birthplaces of persons interviewed.

It is important to put the present minority policy into a post-colonial context. We are today living in a post-colonial world which is obviously globalised. The other side of the coin is that the power of the nation state has weakened and national minorities have strengthened their positions within the nation state. The implementation of the European minority legislation is part of this context.

The Application of the Swedish Minority Language Legislation

The new kind of protection for minority language, which was launched at the 1st of April 2000, changed the ethnic map of Sweden in a profound way. First of all the Swedish Parliament ratified the Framework Con-

vention for the Protection of National Minorities, and also the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. Second, two new national laws took effect in order to support, maintain and make easier the use of Sámi, Finnish and Meänkieli languages as those of minorities within the society.

The two laws are national laws, but with an explicit regional application in the county of Norrbotten. The law considering the use of the Sámi language is valid in the municipality of Arjeplog, Jokkmokk, Gällivare and Kiruna. The law considering the use of Finnish and Meänkieli languages is valid in the municipality of Pajala, Övertorneå, Haparanda, Gällivare and Kiruna. The laws give the right to every individual, in those local municipalities, to use Sámi, Finnish and Meänkieli languages orally in contact with courts and administrative authorities, and also the right to have written resolutions interpreted to their mother tongue. Minorities can also use their language in contact with any regional and national courts or administrative authority, if there is an established connection with the administrative district where these laws are valid. The matter in question must concern the *exercise* of authority, not all aspects of activity. The laws also allows minorities to engage in preschool activities and care for the elderly using their languages, within the actual areas.

The 1990s were a breakthrough for the national minori-

ties in Sweden, also in cultural matters. A strong cultural development has occurred among the minorities. This development is especially visible among the Sámi and Torne Valley people within cultural activities like theatre, literature, music, film, media and art.

The carrying through of the new legislation has been evaluated in three different investigations. The first investigation was done by the county administrative board of Norrbotten in the year 2000, the same year the legislation was launched. A great number of authorities answered questions about how minority languages had been used before the legislation, compared to after its launching. The outcome of the investigation showed that the minority languages were used quite often in the lower Torne Valley, but less so in the upper mining district and the Sámi area (Finska, meänkieli etc 2000). The point of view of the language users' did not appear in the investigation, only the authorities' view.

Therefore the county administrative board in 2002 ordered a new investigation from Luleå University of Technology. The aim was to examine how the minority language users themselves had experienced the realisation of the two laws. The investigation was made in the form of interviews and inquiries. It showed that a high share of the interviewed used their minority language in the home environment and in different official contexts. In connection with authorities, however, only a third used their minority language (Elenius & Ekenberg 2002).

The third investigation was done by Luleå University of Technology in 2004, this time at the request of the Swedish Parliament's Standing Committee on the Constitution. The aim was to conduct a comprehensive investigation concerning the realisation of the language legislation in the county of Norrbotten, from both a citizen and authority perspective. Out of the three criteria *identity*, *effectiveness* and *participation*, the encounter between citizens and authorities was analysed.³

Obstacles for the Realisation of the Legislation

In the 2004 investigation both a general survey and a special survey were carried out to find out how the authorities had implemented the legislation. Supplementary interviews were conducted with the users of minority languages. Based on the investigations some conclusions could be reached concerning the authorities' attitudes toward the minority languages and the use of the new legislation, and also on how the minority language speakers imagined its use.

It appeared that among the 103 interviewed Sámi, Sweden-Finns and Torne Valley people 87 percent used their mother tongue at home and 85 percent used it in the community. When communicating with authorities only 30 percent used their mother tongue. The most frequent obstacle mentioned, for the realisation of the legislation were different kinds of linguistic obstacles, especially among the Sámi and Torne Valley people. About one fifth within all three language groups mentioned psychological reasons as obstacles for the realisation of the legislation.

An important explanation of the low degree of use of the statutory rights in the legislation is the fact that the Swedish language has for such a long time dominated the public sphere. It has created a split language identity among the Sámi and Torne Valley people. On one hand there has been a private minority language identity, on the other hand a civic identity in Swedish. The split identity, in turn, has sped up the regression of the use of minority languages, since there have been no civic incitements for developing one's minority language. The split identity seems to be associated with a likewise split authority policy.

Many Sámi people gave witness to the frustration they felt when realising that the legislation could not be used in reality, because they knew there were only a few persons in service who could speak Sámi. They also felt that the Sámi language was subordinated in an authority context, and also that many Sámi people could not in a satisfying way speak their mother tongue. The situation in this matter was considerably better for Finnish and Meänkieli.

Minority Language Competence Among Authorities

It is of great importance, for the realisation of minority language legislation, that the authority's staff has a mastery of the minority languages in question. In the administration area of the minority language legislation in Norrbotten, the language competence, however, differs substantially between the three minority languages.

In the investigation 15 percent of the regional/national authorities mentioned that they had a Sámi speaking person. The similar share for Finnish was 73 percent and for Meänkieli 53 percent. Among local authorities 25-50 percent of the authorities mentioned that they had a person who spoke Sámi. For Finnish and Meänkieli 60-100 percent of the personnel said that they could speak the minority language.

Both local and regional/national authorities seem to

have encouraged employees to improve their minority language through courses etc. In this regard the pattern of the local and regional/national authorities does not differ. Between 15 and 18 percent of the authorities mentioned that there was a possibility for language improvement within the service.

The judgment of the language competence among the employees seems to have varied between different administrations and municipalities. Generally speaking the competence was judged as lower for Sámi and higher for Finnish and Meänkieli. In Haparanda, Övertorneå and Pajala, located in the Torne Valley, quite a big share of the employees seemed to have mastered Finnish and Meänkieli. The competence is strengthened by the fact that the two languages are very related.

In this matter it seems like the minority language legislation has not influenced the use of language to a high degree. The legislation seems rather to have confirmed a previous language pattern within preschool activities and old-age care. In the three previously mentioned municipalities the administration likes to talk about the activities on minority languages as integrated in the ordinary activities. The staff said that Finnish and Meänkieli were used contextually, according to individual needs.

The Sámi Language as the Most Marginalised

The authorities' relatively positive evaluation of their own competence is partly contradicted by the result from the individual survey among the employees in the municipality of Jokkmokk and Haparanda. Jokkmokk is situated in the Sámi mountain area about 200 km from the coast. It's area is the second biggest of the municipalities in Sweden, but half of the area is a bare mountain area. In 2003 there were 5 633 inhabitants, among them many Sámi people, in Jokkmokk. In the municipality the legislation for Sámi language is in use.

Haparanda is situated at the border between Sweden and Finland. The town was established in 1842 as a result of the treaty in 1809, when Sweden lost the former Swedish town Torneå to Russia. As a compensation a new town, Haparanda, was established at the Swedish side. During the 1990s, and onwards, big efforts have been made to strengthen the co-operation between Torneå and Haparanda, and also to turn them into one single town crossing the nation border. Haparanda has a mixed population of Swedes, Finns, Sweden-Finns and Torne Valley people. In 2003 there were 10 346 inhabitants. In the municipality the legislation for Finnish and Meänkieli languages is in use.

In the investigation of 2004 the implementation of the minority legislation, in the administration of these two municipalities, was compared. From the answers by 126 randomly selected employees it appeared that only about 6 percent of the employees in Jokkmokk spoke and understood the Sámi language quite well. In Haparanda the corresponding share was 60 percent for Finnish and 40 percent for Meänkieli. The lower language competence in Sámi among the personnel in Jokkmokk leads to the conclusion that Sámi speakers are less likely to try to use their mother tongue when in contact with the authorities.

In regards to both degree of service and efficiency in communication the Finnish language is highest in rank, compared to the other minority languages, followed by Meänkieli. The Sámi language is marginalised in all realms within the local administration. When addressed in Sámi language only about 20 percent of the civil servants questioned in the municipality of Jokkmokk could communicate in Sámi. For the Finnish part the corresponding share was more than 70 percent in Haparanda, and for Meänkieli nearly 50 percent.

The comparison between the two municipalities shows that Finnish and Meänkieli have a very strong position in the municipality of Haparanda. In Jokkmokk the Sámi language has a corresponding weak position. Low language competence among the personnel and frustration among the Sámi speakers in using their mother tongue, leads to a vicious circle which renders the Sámi language in Jokkmokk invisible. In that way the lack of competence in Sámi is transformed to an imagined non-need to use the language among the employees. In Haparanda the situation is different. The nearness to Finland, the similarity between Finnish and Meänkieli and the big share of Sweden-Finns and Torne Valley people in the municipality makes the two minority languages support each other.

Child- and Elderly Care Offered in Minority Languages

All of the municipalities, affected by the minority legislation, state that they have managed to offer child care activities in minority languages. In the case of Haparanda the demand for child care in Finnish is solved by buying the service from Torneå in Finland. In many cases day care activities in the minority language were already in place, before the existence of the minority legislation.

In the area of mining production in Gällivare and Kiruna there was already child care activity in the Sámi language. In this area the biggest achievements seem to

have been made for the Finnish speaking children. Concerning Meänkieli there are certain integrated efforts regarding the minority languages in preschool activities, especially in the northernmost village Karesuando. But the demands for service in Meänkieli in Gällivare and Kiruna seems to have been low, as has been the commitment of the municipalities to develop activities in Meänkieli. This is illustrated by the fact that neither Gällivare, nor Kiruna, thinks there has been additional cost because of the minority language legislation.

In all of the municipalities the demands within elderly care have been met by minority language speaking personnel. In the Sámi administration area certain care is only aimed at the Sámi speaking population. This is the case for the residents at Kaitumgården in Jokkmokk.⁴ Within the administration area for Finnish and Meänkieli integrated solutions are applied, meaning that personnel addresses single individuals in their minority language. One of the problems has been that, when lacking rooms, elderly people with different languages, have been forced to live together in the same room (Elenius 2004).

Influences of Swedish Minority Policy on the Administration

The implementation of the minority legislation in Sweden after 2000 must be regarded in the context of the minority policy of the state. The use of minority languages in different administrations is dependent on the status of the languages in different periods. A deliberate language policy, regarding the Sámi and Torne Valley people, was carried out throughout the 19th and 20th century. There was, however, no deliberate policy towards the Sweden-Finns before the 1950s, and they were not even regarded as a specific minority before that time. Both the Torne Valley people and the Sweden-Finns were in the 19th century regarded as Finns, a uniting ethnonym for Finnish speakers in Sweden.

The Sweden-Finns who lived in the Torne Valley were subjected to the same kind of language policy as the Torne Valley people. The language policy, before the launching of a Home language legislation in the 1960s, can be divided into four periods. From 1845 to 1875 there was a period when Finnish was the language of instruction in primary schools. From 1876 to 1916 an assimilation policy was introduced in primary schools and in other institutions within society. Gradually Swedish became the only language of instruction in school. The assimilation policy was part of the nation state building process in an era of strong nationalism, which also affected the policy in different administrations. The varieties of Finnish, spoken in the county of Norrbotten, were stigmatised and regarded as lower forms of languages for means of communication (Elenius 2001).

From 1917 there was gradual change in the minority policy, but through to the 1960s some teachers still practised an assimilation policy in school (Elenius & Ekenberg 2002).

The Sámi minority policy followed a different course. From the 16th century to 1845 a missionary activism was carried out on the Sámi language. Special, so called, Lap schools were launched in the 18th century for this purpose, and a special department for Sámi ecclesiastical affairs was established in 1840. Between 1846 and 1912 a pragmatic language policy was carried out. The purpose was to integrate Sami reindeer herders with farmers. From 1913 this "civic policy" changed to a combination of assimilation and segregation. The reindeer herding Sámi were segregated, while all Sámi groups were exposed to an assimilative language policy in school. This policy of assimilation went on until the end of the 1950s. In that time a reorientation did occur and Sámi was recognised as a language to use in education (Uppman 1978; Henrysson & Flodin 1992).

From 1969 to 1999 there was a period of Home language education in the mother tongue for the minorities. From this time the language policy towards the Sámi, Sweden-Finns and Torne Valley people was exactly the same. This change was connected with the big worldwide immigration from all the world during that period (Elenius 2006). It was followed by the new minority legislation in 2000.

Conclusions: From a colonial to a post-colonial policy

The European minority legislation must be regarded in a post-colonial context. The notion "colonialism" is here regarded as power structures which have influenced the relations between dominating and subordinated groups in a worldwide economic, political, ideological and culturally coherent system. The de-colonisation has therefore influenced the global legal order for the relations between colonies and colonial powers.

The old colonial powers did in a tangible way loose their grip on the colonies. Spain and Portugal were among the last European colonial powers forced to leave their colonies in Africa. If the former Soviet Union is also considered to be an old colonial power, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the dissolution of the last European colonial power. This caused a transformation from political tensions and antagonisms from the cold war, to new kind of religious and cultural antagonisms in a more globalised world (Hettne 2005; Loomba 2006).

As mentioned before, the minorities in Sweden had quite strong political rights, especially the Finnish speaking minorities. They were totally integrated in

the Swedish legal system. The Sámi people did not have such a strong political position, due both to their socio-economic subordinated position and to the segregating policy towards them. Culturally the reindeer herding Sámi people did receive different kinds of support throughout the 20th century, but in a patriarchal way (Lantto 2000 & 2003; Elenius 2006). This cultural attention to the Sámi way of living had a long historic tradition.

Anyhow, speaking in cultural and identity terms, neither the Finnish speaking minorities, nor the Sámi people, were encouraged to strengthen their vernacular languages, especially not in contact with authorities. In private life the mother tongue had a strong cultural position up to at least the 1960s, but the formal political right to use the vernacular language in contact with authorities was weak. There was no minority language legislation that supported the minorities.

In a way you could say that during the assimilation period, from the 1870s to the 1960s, the minorities maintained a culturally strong identity in private life, but at the same time the minority languages were more and more marginalised in public life. After the 1960s the minorities have gradually received more political power through the political system, but at the same time the cultural minority identity has weakened. During the late part of the 19th century efforts were made to give some support to the vernacular language, but it was not before the year 2 000 that the minority languages received the status of legal minority languages.

With the new minority legislation the status of minority culture and language has been strengthened in public life, but the private minority identity is in a corresponding way weakened. There is a paradoxal shift from a strong private identity of the minorities (with weak cultural status in society) to a weak private identity (with strong cultural status in society).

Notes

1 The notion "Sámi language" refers, in this context, to all varieties of the language; North Sámi, Luleå Sámi and South Sámi.

2 Meänkieli is the name of the variety of Finnish talked by the Torne Valley people at the Swedish side of the Torne river. This minority was created in 1809 when Sweden lost Finland to Russia. The new nation boundary was drawn along the Torne river, which left a Finnish speaking minority on the Swedish side, in the latter part of the 19th century called The Torne Valley People.

3 The below related facts comes from the investigation in 2004, cf. Elenius 2004

4 This service was later withdrawn, but discussions has been going on during 2007 about how to establish the service again.

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