

21th of January, 2014

Some observations from the National Association of Finns in Sweden for the Council of Europe regarding the situation of the Sweden Finns as a national minority and Sweden's compliance with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages:

Positive development for the Sweden Finnish national minority and the group's rights, but only in certain municipalities in Sweden

The National Association of Finns in Sweden have cause to be positive about the favourable development that has started in the Swedish society for raising the status of the Finnish language, and for the work that has begun on the basis of the minority legislation (SFS 2009:724) within the so-called administrative area for the Finnish language. The number of municipalities belonging to the administrative area for the Finnish language is now 48 and from February 1st 2014 there will be a total of 52 municipalities within the administrative area. Around 30 other municipalities are planning on starting consultations in accordance with the minority legislation, or are already initiating or preparing an application to the Swedish government to join the administrative area. However, the Sweden Finns still have different prerequisites for getting their voices heard regarding their rights depending on their place of residence in Sweden, since the majority of the municipalities still don't belong to the administrative area.

Higher education:

The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education has carried out an investigation (2011:14R) and proposed measures on how to ascertain the needs for teachers among the national minorities. Only a fraction of these measures have been put to practice:

Stockholm University has been granted the right to award degrees for teachers of Finnish as a Mother Tongue for grades 7 to 9 and the training is set to start in 2014. The teacher training will be based on the training model for subject teachers. The teachers will become subject teachers for Finnish (as a Mother Tongue) and they will have English or Swedish as a second language subject. The teachers will qualify for teaching grades 7 to 9 (as well as 4 to 6). At the same time there will be an opportunity for additional pedagogical studies, which will qualify the teachers to teach in high school (and thereby also for grades 7 to 9).

In order to strengthen the revitalisation of the Finnish language and its status as a national minority language in Sweden, there must be extensive measures, starting from pre-school and the training of Finnish-speaking, bilingual pre-school staff.

Entrance requirements

The background: Sweden has not had pre-school teacher training for bilingual teacher candidates since the middle of the 1980s. At that time it was available for Finnish, Spanish and Greek speakers and the National Association of Finns in Sweden thinks that the training model from that time could partly serve as a basis for starting new tailored training to meet the needs of the national minorities, which the association has pointed out to the Department of Education.

The state still needs to provide adequate resources for Stockholm University to carry out this teacher training and other training programmes in Finnish, such as pre-school pedagogy, bi- and multilingualism, language didactics for Finnish speakers, social studies in Finnish, etc., so that the national minority's long-term needs can be met in relevant school subjects.

When it comes to the university level education, it is essential that the mother tongue / minority language studies would give so-called merit points when applying to universities and colleges. This would encourage the students to continue mother tongue studies in high school.

At the moment an entry requirement for the subject teacher training is that the student has read Finnish for three years at high school. In practice it would be necessary to evaluate the language skills of each minority language applicant according to real competence criteria, because there are very few students who have studied Finnish in high school. There really is a need for new criteria to evaluate the prior knowledge requirements of minority language applicants, since the current criteria are not suitable. The young people are interested in studying Finnish and they are interested in using the language in their future professional life, but there should also be the possibility to adapt training and courses for them, which would need separate funding.

The National Association of Finns in Sweden is very worried about deficient and unclear legal grounds, coordination and guidelines for pre-school for Sweden Finns and other national minorities:

Even though changes have been promised to the Education Act regarding the removal of the prior knowledge requirements for national minority languages, there are still discrepancies between enforcement of the Education Act, the language legislation and the minority legislation: The Schools Inspectorate's interpretation (Kalix, 2013) of the Education Act's requirements for basic knowledge in the mother tongue was negative for the national minorities. This counteracts the de facto goodwill that is expressed in the language legislation about the public sector's duty to support national minority languages including Finnish, as well as the development work that has been done within the framework of the administrative area for the Finnish language through starting new

Finnish-language and bilingual pre-school units (for example in Borås, Huddinge, Sigtuna, Skövde and Uppsala).

There is still a large future need for strengthening the development work within pre-school and school for Finnish speakers. For example there is a need for a curriculum in Finnish and Finnish as a Second Language. There are also other issues regarding the Sweden Finns that the Swedish National Agency for Education should look into. Including schools in Sweden's minority legislation would be a demand from us minority representatives when it comes to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

It should also be defined more clearly what is meant when the law mentions pre-school 'fully or partly' in Finnish. In English the wording is *substantial part*, but the interpretation of 'partly' has been such, that for example in Stockholm in 2013 it has been deemed enough that a Finnish-speaking parent has been asked to write down Finnish words that the Swedish-speaking pre-school staff has promised to use with the three-year-old.

Lack of social planning for the education of speakers of Finnish and other national minority languages in the fields of pre-school and care of the elderly

There is no planning in terms of social and educational needs for the training of staff for pre-schools and care of the elderly to meet the needs of the national minorities. If we look at the situation from the rights perspective, the national minorities must be included in such planning and here we are quoting a letter from the municipality of Älvkarleby to the National Association of Finns in Sweden on 29th April 2013 regarding the municipality's obligation and ability to provide care for the elderly in Finnish:

"Our goal is 100 %, but it is difficult, since we don't have enough staff members who speak Finnish. In all our recruiting efforts we note Finnish as an extra merit, but very few of the applicants know Finnish. We see the recruitment of Finnish staff as a future problem, since we can see that an increasing number of Finnish inhabitants will have a need for assistance in the home within a period of 5 to 10 years."

The National Association of Finns in Sweden has turned to the Swedish labour office in hopes that the labour office would offer complementary and professional training for young Sweden Finns in order to help the growing needs within both pre-school and care of the elderly. Their answer to our proposal was no, because "there is no lack of Finnish-speaking nurses" ! – According to us, this need is growing quickly the nearest coming years.

There is a need for language cultivation

The follow-up of the implementation of the minority legislation should be added to the duties of The Institute of Language and Folklore.

Professional language cultivation or language planning is needed in order to preserve and develop the national minority languages.

The development of high-quality language planning for Finnish speakers has an intrinsic value and it provides necessary support and good linguistic models to professionals within government, media, culture, etc. and for all Finnish speakers in Sweden. It can also serve as a good model for other language groups in Sweden. The National Association has noted that the Institute for Language and Folklore, which is the principal of the Language Council, has a broader mission in its Swedish activities for the dissemination of knowledge of languages, dialects, folklore, names and other intangible cultural heritage in Sweden, while the small Finnish department of Language Council is not tasked to do any of this and has no practical means for it.

The Institute for Language and Folklore has given revitalisation grants for national minority languages, including Finnish, but their effect has hardly been seen as yet. Regardless of this the National Association of Finns in Sweden emphasises that it is very important that Sweden continues to support such revitalisation projects and that the Institute can spread good models when they exist. In this context it is important to point out that the older native Finnish-speakers in Sweden should be seen as a linguistic resource and as potential language teachers, who would be happy to share their language skills to younger people.

Radio and TV in the service of Sweden Finns and other national minorities:

The situation of the public service media for Finnish speakers does not match the public sector's obligations towards the large Sweden Finnish national minority and the need for access to a diverse range of media in their own national minority language. The National Association has pointed this out in their responses to, and contacts with the Government of Sweden.

It is important that Swedish public radio and television (SR, SVT and UR) are given enough resources so that they can live up to the obligations of making Sweden Finns and other national minorities visible as well as meeting their language and culture-related needs in their programming.

A new burning problem has in December 2013 come to cause media-problems: YLE, The Finnish public service Broadcasting Company, can have taken part of the opinion which does not support the survival of the Finnish language I Sweden! YLE seems not any more actively support the work for Finnish language in Sweden: YLE

announces that the channel TV Finland is not going to exist so long time. – That arises a big question, the Finnish –speaking national minority can miss the only tv-channel, that can be seen I Stockholm with neighbouring areas, even that to small area since there are Sweden Finns in all over the country.

For the Finnish-speaking national minority it is especially important to support the traditional cooperation in public service between Sweden and Finland. This cooperation can be helpful in meeting the needs of the Finnish-speaking radio and TV consumers: they need to be able to follow radio and TV in their own language and without technical difficulties – which many older people associate with web-based media services. The National Association of Finns in Sweden currently holds the broadcast permit for TV Finland in Sweden, even though we are not a media company. These are terrestrial free broadcasts in Stockholm and the Mälardalen area.

The National Association thinks it is very urgent that the TV Finland programming should be included in the obligations of Swedish public TV (SVT) in order to provide an equal TV programming to all Sweden Finns regardless of where they live in Sweden. In the current situation most Sweden Finns need to make do with different cable TV offerings and in rural areas there are no opportunities to view the programming. At this writing some details are unclear, after the transfer of TV Finland's signal no longer goes via satellite since early summer. The content and availability of TV Finland is currently under threat because of decisions by the Finnish public service company YLE.

At the writing moment, the Swedish Television SVT and the National Association of Finns in Sweden does have a good dialogue on issues of TV-cooperation between Sweden and Finland, even if the results of the dialogue are not known yet.

The quality aspect is also important in the public service media for credibility's sake, and for the survival and development of the Finnish language. To be able to offer quality, well-educated and knowledgeable editors and journalists are needed.

This in turn requires further education and other training efforts. There would also be a need for resources to cooperate within media training with Finland, which could benefit both the Finnish-speaking minority in Sweden and the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland.

The Sweden Finnish culture and civil society:

There is a need for more financial resources to strengthen the Sweden Finnish culture and the conditions to exercise and develop this culture in various cultural fields such as theatre and literature. This could be done through popular education and through the individuals' own creativity in different cultural areas and for different age groups of children and adolescents.

The collaborative model within Swedish cultural policy is a demanding challenge for national minorities. Our work needs economic support based on our circumstances and needs. There is still a lot to be wished for in many counties.

For a culture-bearing language, as Finnish language indeed is in Sweden, we need both preservation and development, pre-school and school and leisure activities, education and research, linguistic and cultural impulses in Finnish from Finland, and support for the good that already exists. All this should be in enriching interaction with the rest of the cultural life in Sweden - but in a way that the Finnish language can survive and develop also through our children and grandchildren in Sweden.

The National Association of Finns in Sweden appeals to the Council of Europe's survey group, that they would note in their coming report how Sweden applies the Council's rules and regulations when it comes to the rights of the Finnish-speaking minority: the minority legislation exists, but who really cares? – There are still far too many who don't.

As long as the rules of offering pre-school and care of the elderly "partly" in Finnish can be interpreted any which way without consequences, there is reason for strong criticism against Sweden.

On behalf of the National Association of Finns in Sweden

Voitto Visuri
Chairman

Raija Kärkkäinen Eriksson
Ombudsman