

Re: Third Periodic Report on Implementation of the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities

General remarks:

1. The Finland Swedes are by far the **largest linguistic minority** in Finland, comprising close to 290,000 individuals (c. 5.5 per cent of the total population of the country).
2. The Finland Swedes inhabit a **coherent territory** along the western, southwestern, and southern coastlines of Finland. This territory also originally comprises the Helsinki region, which is today dominated by an immigrant Finnish-speaking majority.
3. The Finland Swedes are an **autochthonous population** in their native territory. They are, therefore, not comparable with the more recent immigrant minorities in the country.
4. According to the constitution of Finland and the 'language law' complementing it, Swedish is an **official language** in Finland with rights fully equal to those of Finnish. Historically, Swedish is the language of culture in Finland.

Problems:

1. The official status of Swedish in Finland has been constantly declining since 1921 (the first language law), but especially after 2004 (the second language law). Both the Parliament and the government have, following unilateral decisions made by the Finnish-speaking majority in all representative organs, systematically abolished Swedish-speaking entities at all levels of administration (local administration, justice departments, police districts, health care districts, etc.). Although it would have been possible to retain and/or establish viable Swedish-speaking entities, Swedish is left in a minority position in all the new 'enlarged' entities.
2. Swedish-speaking citizens of Finland are no longer in a position to use their native language in communication with the authorities. Officially, the bilingual principle of the country requires that all authorities can communicate in both Finnish and Swedish, but this is no longer a reality. The status of Swedish as a second language in Finnish schools has been marginalized, and the language requirements as stipulated by the constitution are not followed in practice. Negligence in serving the Swedish-speaking minority in their own language is not sanctioned. Most government information, including, for instance, the *Periodic Reports on National Minorities* are not available in Swedish.
3. In official communication, as in school textbooks, the Swedish presence in Finland is systematically ignored or the facts concerning it distorted. The Swedish-speakers in Finland are increasingly often presented as 'immigrants', allegedly comparable to the other, much smaller, immigrant minorities in the country. Also, in popular discourse, comparisons are made between the Swedes in Finland and the Finns in Sweden, although the former are an autochthonic population with a native territory while the latter are very recent economic migrants with no regional identity in Sweden.
4. Swedish in Finland belongs to the context of regionally important minority languages in Europe. Swedish in Finland is the only such language in Europe that is today declining, while for many other languages (Basque, Breton, South Tirolian German, etc.) recent development has been very positive. Without sanctions from the European central organs, the Finnish authorities will continue the policy of ethnic elimination against the Swedish speakers in Finland. *Finlandssvensk Samling r.f.* asks the relevant European authorities to help spread objective information concerning the language policies of Finland, so that Swedish is not totally marginalized in the country. The matter is urgent.