

To

***The Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the National Minorities,
Council of Europe***

Secretariat to the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the National Minorities

Council of Europe

Agora Building, 1 quai Jacoutot

F – 67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France

Tel: +33 (0)3 90 21 44 33

minorities.fcnm@coe.int

Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Secretariat of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

DG II - Directorate of Dignity and Equality

Council of Europe Agora Building, 1 quai Jacoutot

F-67075 Strasbourg Cedex, France

minlang.secretariat@coe.int

SERIOUS DISREGARD

Comments by the National Association of Swedish Tornedalians (STR-T)

on Sweden's Fifth Report to the

Council of Europe

Shadow report

2023-03-17

info@str-t.com

Tel: +46 (0)73 735 40 91

Org.nr: 897600-3569

Bg: 669-2230



Svenska Tornedalingars Riksförbundet
Tornionlaaksoalaiset

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1. Preamble

In connection with the periodic review by the Advisory Committee, the National Association of Swedish Tornedalians (STR-T) (“the Association”) would like to submit comments and views on Sweden’s Fifth Report to the Council of Europe under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. The Association particularly wishes to draw the attention of The Council of Europe to the constant and serious exclusion, disregard and marginalisation of the National Minority Tornedalians, (“the Minority”) which also includes the Kven and Lantalaaset identities, from issues, contexts and meetings that concern the Minority. These actions bring far reaching consequences to the Minority and contravene articles in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Tornedalians are the National Minority in Sweden of which the public has least awareness, which is also one of the reasons for the constant exclusion and disregard. This marginalisation in turn contributes to a continued lack of awareness and the Minority seems in this respect to be a kind of Catch 22 situation. It is a situation which cannot be remedied solely through the severely limited resources of the Minority, but requires perceptible measures from the Government, state bodies, regions and municipalities. Also the situation of the Meänkieli language calls for acute targeted measures for its survival. STR-T cannot see that the language will be strengthened and vitalised as long as there is such distinct exclusion of Tornedalians from different areas of minority policy and society in general. That the Minority is not given space and the opportunity to have its say on issues which closely affect the Minority, is to be seen as demeaning the Minority and weakening its status in society. This does not give increased interest and motivation to an already assimilated ethnic group to learn their historical and cultural language, but rather the opposite. The Association sees the linguistic issue as crucial but is critical to the lack of space accorded the Minority’s culture and history in the contexts where, nevertheless, the Minority is included. Minority matters are restricted to merely the language issue. The Association says also that exclusion, marginalisation and demeaning of the Minority and its matters are becoming increasingly systematic. The state’s exclusion of the National Minority Tornedalians from important reports and events that concern the Minority, and the non-equal treatment of National Minorities reinforce conflicts which the state at one time created through its intervention in the lives and customs of ethnic groups. As regards elderly care, language and education, much remains to be done to create conditions for the survival of the National Minority language Meänkieli. The criticised educational chain still has many shortcomings and there is a lack of follow-up which makes it easy for the principals to avoid compliance with the law.

2. Discrimination and exclusion

From Sweden's Fifth Report, p.1:

It is necessary to continue to combat racism and discrimination, since the risk of exposure to threats, hate and violence must not be an obstacle to people belonging to a National Minority to be open about their identity, their language and their culture.

Comment: The National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset is exposed to discrimination by not being included in matters that closely affect the Minority and by being marginalised in contexts where it is given that the Minority should be seen and other minorities are given exposure and space. Today, the Minority is treated as the majority population without consideration given to the legal protection afforded it as a minority through the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

2.1 Exclusion from the review of the Reindeer Husbandry Act

In summer 2021, the Swedish Government appointed a Riksdag committee for the review of the Reindeer Husbandry Act. For over two years, ever since the drafting of the directives, the National Association STR-T, which represents Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset, has striven to be included in the work. It is an issue, which in practice concerns the historical narrative and the right to land use. The commission has not taken seriously the early history of the Meänkieli-speaking minority, but has presented a short and cursory account of the recent history of Tornedalians comprising six pages, while the corresponding historical account about the Sámi minority comprises no less than 432 pages. The overall historical picture that forms the basis for the future law amendments is thereby narrowed, selective and exclusionary of relevant documentation. This is an extremely serious matter in view of the sole rights to land use – and indirectly to the exercise of culture and traditions – which groups within the Sámi minority are asserting. Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset also risk losing their rights to use of their own historical lands for purposes other than hunting and fishing.

Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset have a strong judicial history stretching back to time immemorial. The Minority meets the criteria for indigenous peoples but the Government has not addressed the issue. The Association has made some progress in the work for inclusion and received acknowledgement in the form of an additional directive and an offer to nominate a representative to the expert committee. The additional directive, however, is not satisfactory since with the current wording the Minority equated with other Swedes without the legal protection by which the National Minority is covered. The Minority's *rights* are described as *needs* and are not distinguished from those of the rest of the local population. The Association has in writing declined participation merely in the expert group, since the offer is still a belittling of the Minority's role in the issue and does not give the Minority its rightful influence. This letter¹ was submitted to the Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure on 26 January 2023 and sent for information to the Advisory Committee for the Protection of National Minorities on 2 March 2023². Time is passing and proposed law amendments are being drafted - law amendments which do not take into consideration the rights of Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset. In other words, the politicians in power on the committee, the parliamentarians, are due to take a position and make decisions on legal amendments which will have considerable effect on the Minority without its participation

¹ <https://str-t.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/svar-till-landsbygds-och-infrastrukturdepartementet-gallande-medverkan-i-expertgrupp-i-renmarkskommitten-str-t-20230126.pdf>

² Doc 2 Response to the invitation to propose an expert to the inquiry into new reindeer husbandry legislation STR-T 20230126

and without its contributed and relevant expertise. The consequences that each decision brings should be carefully and critically examined before the decisions are made. This cannot be done as long as the perspective of one vitally affected party on the issue is not included. STR-T together with the local association Svenska Kväner - Lantalaiset submitted to the Council of Europe³ a more detailed letter about the exclusion of the Minority on this issue in November 2022.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part III, p.18:

A commission was recently appointed to review the 1971 reindeer husbandry legislation. The work to draft directives has been carried out through close consultation with both the Sámi Parliament and representatives for Sámi civil society.

The Sámi people's opportunities for and influence over the usage of their economic, social and cultural rights are important to the Government. The Government has therefore, together with Australia and Canada among other nations contributed both knowledge and economic resources to an OECD study aimed to improve indigenous peoples' opportunities for economic growth.

Comment: Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset have strong links, past and present, to the issue, but have played no part whatsoever in drafting the directives. The Association's request for the inclusion of the Meänkieli-speaking ethnic group has been disregarded. The National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset has every reason to ask why the Government does not see that opportunities for this Minority to enjoy influence over the usage of its economic, social and cultural rights are important. The Tornedalian National Minority meets the criteria that define indigenous peoples in ILO 169 in the terms of the convention, but Sweden's Government has not wanted to investigate the history or definition of Tornedalians as an indigenous people in Sweden. A request for indigenous status⁴ was submitted to the Government on 2020-05-28 but was never addressed.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part I, p.4:

Also within other processes, such as the coming investigation of the Reindeer Husbandry Act, the Government Offices have held consultations.

Comment: The meetings at which the National Minority Tornedalians has been able to make its voice heard with the commission officials have taken place after pressure from and at the request of the Minority itself. All the meetings have taken place late in the ongoing work of the commission.

From The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (SÖ 2002:2)⁵:

Article 5.2:

5.2 Without prejudice to measures taken in pursuance of their general integration policy, the Parties shall refrain from policies or practices aimed at the assimilation of persons belonging to National Minorities against their will and shall protect these persons from any action aimed at such assimilation.

³ Letter regarding the discriminative treatment of Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset by the Swedish state 2022-11-18, <https://str-t.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/to-the-council-of-europe-discriminative-treatment-of-tornedalians20221118.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.str-t.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Krav-pa-urfolksstatus-for-tornedalingar-kvaner-and-lantalaiset-enligt-Artikel-1-i-ILO-169-200528.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/02b946ed1ee747a1a7bf4874fd8d3633/ramkonvention-om-skydd-for-nationella-minoriteter/>

Comment: On the issue in question, Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset are not treated by the state as a National Minority, since the group is excluded from working in the commission in question and from the directives⁶ upon which it is based. The additional directive to the Reindeer Lands Committee (N 2021:02), the committee directive 2022:58⁷, equates the Meänkieli-speaking minority with parts of the majority population that have been excluded and still disregards the special rights of the National Minority. On this issue, the Minority is treated as a Swedish group without special influence on the design of the Reindeer Husbandry Act and without the statutory protection of National Minorities which covers it. This despite the fact that the elements in the Minority culture and traditions are not merely associated with the parts examined by the Reindeer Lands Committee, indeed they *are* the Minority's culture and traditions. This treatment of the Minority indicates an ongoing, modern-day Swedification process, where the state through indifference is pursuing assimilation of an already severely impacted minority. Instead of protecting the Minority from assimilation, it is subjecting the Minority to assimilation. This is being done at the same time as an ongoing Truth and Reconciliation Commission, appointed by the Government, is investigating historical violations and abuse of Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset.

2.2 Exclusion from the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

Exclusion of the Tornedalian minority from important issues where the Minority has considerable expertise is also practised by state bodies. The purpose of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)⁸ is to preserve biodiversity and strive for a fair distribution of gains made from the use of genetic resources. For this, The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency has been commissioned to draft new frameworks; and the co-ordinating responsibility, the so-called *focal point responsibility*, rests with the Sámi Parliament. The convention addresses among other things traditional knowledge and small-scale farming, within which the Tornedalians minority has considerable expertise and to which it has strong historical and cultural ties – considerably stronger than those of many others who have been included in work on the convention. STR-T has in a written request to the Sámi Parliament asked to be participatory in the work but has been denied. The Association considers it a serious matter that the Sámi Parliament, which is not only the responsible Swedish authority on the issue, but also a representative of the Sámi people, acts in a way that excludes and demeans the role of Tornedalians on such a major, important issue that strongly affects the Minority. This is taking place despite the awareness of the Sámi Parliament of the strong links between the Tornedalian minority and its knowledge in the fields which the convention addresses. Additionally, responsibility for spreading awareness of the National Minorities in Sweden lies with the Sámi Parliament, which makes the authority's actions in this case even more astonishing. It damages our Association's trust in the Sámi Parliament as the responsible authority for spreading awareness of the culture, history, traditions and language of the Tornedalian minority.

It is disheartening and outrageous to read how an ethnic group with National Minority status is completely marginalised in an area where it has the expertise to rank among the parties the issue is considered to affect most strongly. STR-T sees the denial of the Minority's participation on the issue as demeaning and discriminatory. The Sámi Parliament and the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency through these actions also contribute to polarisation. In its communication to

⁶ En ny renskötsellagstiftning – det samiska folkets rätt till renskötsel, jakt and fiske, dir. 2021:35

⁷ <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/e234943d908a4c98b1ceffc50e274f80/tillagsdirektiv-till-renmarkskommitten-dir.-n-202102.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.cbd.int/>

the Riksdag *Fresh Start for a Stronger Minority Policy (2017/18:282)*⁹, the Government states that the policy is to be implemented together with the National Minorities and not by another party on behalf of the National Minorities.

From the communication to the Riksdag *Fresh Start for a Stronger Minority Policy*, p. 33:
The Government can therefore state that the considerable lack of confidence signalled by the Sweden Finnish delegation and the National Association of Swedish Tornedalians (STR-T) among others shall be given considerable weight in the assessment. An overall assessment can be made that there are considerable shortcomings in the present remit for coordination, development and follow-up and that these shortcomings hamper the minority policy. This ultimately leads to a shortfall in compliance with the rights of the National Minorities. It also means there is considerable potential for improved coordination and increased effectiveness in the operations. The Government therefore judges that coordination, development and follow-up of the minority policy area should be strengthened.

Comment: STR-T can state that the shortcomings remain in the remit for coordination. The Sámi Parliament has, as the responsible party for coordination on the Convention on Biological Diversity, through its disregard for the Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaïset, has failed in its remit to include strongly affected parties. STR-T questions whether the authority is appropriate to have the designated role of responsible coordinator in the Convention with the power to deny participation of another National Minority and strongly affected party.

From The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (SÖ 2002:2):
Article 20

In the exercise of the rights and freedoms flowing from the principles enshrined in the present Framework Convention, any person belonging to a National Minority shall respect the national legislation and the rights of others, in particular those of persons belonging to the majority or to other National Minorities.

Comment: The exclusionary approach of the state authority, the Sámi Parliament, and its exclusion of the National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaïset from work on the Convention on Biological Diversity are in breach of this article in the Framework Convention.

2.3 Discrimination in public service

The media fill an important function in raising awareness of National Minorities and should in its social reporting include different occurrences that concern the National Minorities. The public service broadcasters Swedish Radio (SR), Swedish Television (SVT) and Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR) have a particularly far-reaching responsibility. Public service broadcasts in the National Minority languages contribute to raising the awareness of a wide audience of the linguistic minorities. In 2016, the public service broadcaster Swedish Television (SVT) screened a TV production called *Midnattssol* (Midnight Sun) which was set in Kiruna Municipality. In the production, Kvens were portrayed as alcoholic poachers. There was no other mention of the Meänkieli-speaking minority. Kiruna was portrayed as a purely Sámi and Swedish community. Many Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaïset were infuriated by this film and extremely upset. The depiction of Kvens in the film was both discriminatory and a violation. In a society where awareness of the Tornedalian National Minority is at a critical low, and awareness of the included minorities Kvens and Lantalaïset even lower, this depiction risks being taken as fact.

⁹ <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/1714b43194a84a409955192b48147374/nystart-for-en-starkt-minoritetspolitik-skr.-201718282.pdf>

Sadly, this example is not the only occasion where public service, SVT, has discriminated against Kvens. During 2022, SVT has been working on the production of a documentary on Sweden's history, whose purpose is to describe the entire development of present-day Sweden from the ice age to more or less the present day. The history of Tornedalians is limited to the 19th and 20th centuries. The history of Kvens was originally not due to be included for the reason that they lack a historical narrative. STR-T requested a meeting with those responsible for the production, at which the Association demanded that also the early history of Tornedalian, Kven and Lantalaishet minority should be included in the programme. The Association submitted contact details to researchers at other seats of knowledge that SVT can use. The Kvens have a strong judicial history. There is documentation in the form of tax registers, manual signs, parish registers and the minutes of meetings, preserved among other places in the National Archive, which corroborates the existence of the Minority. The first recorded mention of the Kvens in particular is Ottar's travel account from the ninth century AD. The document is preserved at the British Library in London, under the reference "Additional 47967". STR-T has had no contact with the producers since during 2022, and so does not know whether the approach to this issue has changed. Since Kven history can also be seen as part of the early history of the Tornedalian minority, it is even less appropriate to completely exclude it from this type of educational TV production in the public service domain. This exemplifies how the Meänkieli-speaking minority is discriminated due to the lack of a cohesive account of history.

2.4 Discriminated in the presence of the Equality Ombudsman

On 24 November 2022, STR-T took part in an open dialogue meeting with the Equality Ombudsman (DO) in Stockholm on the theme of ethnic discrimination. During a lecture by an invited representative from an association in a suburb, STR-T reacted to the speaker's disappointment at the small number of "coloured" attendees, as the speaker put it, and that according to the speaker it is those groups which are the "truly discriminated" parties. STR-T explained that the National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaishet are discriminated in many respects and that one of many reasons is precisely because they do not differ in appearance in any way from the majority population. The Minority does not wear particularly distinguishing clothes in everyday life, with the exception of beak shoes, which belong to our cultural heritage and are used day-to-day by some. The response from the speaker was that the Minority should be happy to "look like the majority population". The Association perceived that the vulnerability of Tornedalians and discrimination against the Minority were belittled. That this occurred during an open meeting in the presence of the Equality Ombudsman was even more remarkable and exemplifies how demeaning behaviour towards Tornedalians is accepted as legitimate in society. Equality Ombudsman officials handled the situation professionally by intervening and explaining that there are different types of discrimination and that they cannot and should not be compared in the way it was done in this case.

2.5 The Discrimination Act

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part II, p.13:

The Government continues work to ensure that the Discrimination Act is as comprehensive as possible.

Comment: Language is still omitted as a discrimination criterion, which STR-T regards with deep concern. A pupil in Kalix Municipality was told by a teacher that Meänkieli is a "läte" ("animal noise"). The parents reported the incident to the Schools Inspectorate, which submitted the case to the Equality Ombudsman, referring to the fact that the occurrence had only to do with the language. Since language is not a discrimination criterion, the case was closed. In other words, the

pupil was exposed to repression and humiliation in front of the class without consequences either for the teacher or the school. A law amendment is needed here to clearly protect the National Minorities from this type of language discrimination.

3. Influence and participation

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part I, p.4:

One of three central areas within minority policy is participation and influence.

Comment: The National Minority Tornedaliens, Kvens and Lantalaaset is not granted just participation or influence in minority policy in Sweden through exclusion on important issues which affect it, and also through the Minority being kept unreasonably limited in resources without acceptable opportunities for influence.

3.1 Exclusion on issues concerning history, culture and land rights

The Government describes in its report that participation and influence are central for the National Minorities. When it comes to this issue, all too often it does not apply in practice to the National Minority Tornedaliens, Kvens and Lantalaaset. The issues, events and areas from which the Meänkieli-speaking minority is excluded are numerous. Examples also mentioned under other items in this report are exclusion from the reindeer land issue, marginalisation during the EU summit in Kiruna and exclusion from work with the Convention on Biological Diversity.

3.2 Establishment of a language centre

Concerning the establishment of a Meänkieli language centre, influence and participation for the Minority has been a clear ambition on the part of the state – on paper. Reality has not really been in line with that ambition. Organisations representing the four non-Sámi National Minorities have all experienced a lack of substantial influence or opportunities for participation in the early process, whereat the minorities in September 2022, jointly requested a dialogue with the authority ISOF, which has been commissioned to establish the language centre. The organisations were critical that no dialogue meetings had been held after the first start-up meetings in the beginning of the year 2022 and that the minorities possessing expertise and experience had not been given the opportunity of participation and influence throughout the entire period when recruitment of employees for the language centre had been ongoing. An improvement was promised by the authority and STR-T hopes for a significant difference in the future.

From Sweden's Fifth Report:

At the national level, the Government Offices annually hold consultations at which the responsible minister or state secretary takes part.

Comment: No consultation was held with representatives for the Tornedaliens in 2022. The Ministry of Culture explained that the lack of consultation was due to the prolonged period needed to form a Government.

3.3 Major local differences

The influence of the Minority at local level varies considerably. One concrete example of municipalities overlooking and disregarding the right of National Minorities to influence and participation is the way Kalix Municipality handles consultation. Kalix Municipality is an administrative area for Meänkieli and Finnish. No consultations with associations representing National Minorities have taken place in three years. Instead, the municipality has gone in the opposite direction and via a council assembly decision removed associations that represent the National Minorities from the rules of procedure of the municipal coordination bodies. Kalix Municipality also adopted new advice and guidelines without consultation with associations representing the National Minorities. Both decisions were appealed to the Administrative Court¹⁰, which found in favour of the municipality. The law is too weak and does not protect the minorities.

4. Marginalisation and disregard

In its communication to the Riksdag *Fresh Start for a Stronger Minority Policy (2017/18:282)*¹¹ the Government states that awareness of and the visibility of the National Minorities need to increase in the community.

4.1 Marginalisation during visits from EU authorities

Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset are too often denied space to be seen and participate in events and on matters which are important to the Minority. PFA clear and recent example of this is when Sweden hosted the first meeting of its presidency, in Kiruna in January 2023. More details on this occurrence can be read in a letter addressed to the Government Offices that STR-T also submitted to the Council of Europe on an earlier occasion.¹² The letter is also to be found on STR-T's website.¹³ The marginalisation led to strong reactions and indignation among STR-T's members and some contacted the Association's office. The Government Offices were responsible for planning, which was carried out in consultation with Kiruna Municipality. STR-T has sent written questions to the Government Offices on the reason for disregarding the Meänkieli-speaking minority throughout the event at the same time as the Sámi National Minority was given space in the programme during flag hoisting, receiving top politicians and the opportunity of dialogue with the Government and the County Administrative Board in Norrbotten County. The reply received by the Association referred to the fact that the Sámi Parliament is a Swedish authority.

4.2 Marginalisation in the media

Low public awareness of the Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset also means constant marginalisation in the media. The Minority's perspective, particularly in news media, on subjects that strongly affect it, is very seldom reflected in the local media. In the national media, the coverage is even poorer, almost non-existent. A recent concrete example of coverage where Tornedalians, Lantalaiset and Kvens were marginalised, despite the fact that Minority participation should have been self-evident, was the broadcast by Swedish Television of *Luciamorgon* (St Lucia celebrations) from Jukkasjärvi. The programme was broadcast from the

¹⁰ Administrative Court in Luleå Case No. 1450-20 and Administrative Court in Luleå Case No. 1449-20

¹¹ <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/1714b43194a84a409955192b48147374/nystart-for-en-starkt-minoritetspolitik-skr.-201718282.pdf>

¹² Doc 1 Invisibility of Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset at EU summit

¹³ <https://str-t.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/till-regeringskansliet-osynliggorande-av-tornedalingar-under-eu-toppmote-20230116.pdf>

Lantalaiset Museum in the village but there was no mention of Meänkieli or the Meänkieli-speaking minority even though the programme was broadcast from a core area for the Minority. Buildings such as the church and houses built by the Meänkieli-speaking population were filmed without mention of the Minority. Sámi music and culture however were given a clear space. STR-T wishes to emphasise that in no way does the Association oppose Sámi participation in the programme, but the Association is sharply critical of the absence of the Tornedalian, Kven and Lantalaiset minority and the discriminatory treatment of these two National Minorities that have many common denominators, especially historically, since the ethnic groups have co-existed. STR-T is also critical of the fact that the picture which public service, SVT, gives of the history and culture of our northern National Minorities in this way becomes biased. The cultural diversity is not reflected in the media.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part III, p.27:

Article 9

9.1 The parties undertake to acknowledge that the right to freedom of speech for those belonging to a National Minority encompasses freedom of opinion and freedom to receive and spread details and ideas in the minority language without the intervention of public bodies and independently of territorial boundaries. The parties shall within the framework of their judicial system ensure that people belonging to a National Minority are not exposed to discrimination as regards their access to the media.

Comment: The space given to the National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset by the media in the news and the social sphere is marginal even in cases where it the issue dealt with strongly affects the Minority. No significant measures concerning this have been taken on the part of the state; it is solely the Minority's own constant struggle for space and visibility in the community. The Minority perceives itself discriminated by the media, which through pure ignorance or for some other reason chooses not to focus on the Minority perspective on social questions, at the same time as other minorities are given space and visibility. One of Sweden's biggest daily newspapers which monitors minority policy issues is Dagens Nyheter (DN). The Association has on several occasions contacted the newspaper with tips and information about the perspective of the Tornedalian National Minority on topical issues, but this has only resulted in a single article in the whole of 2022. The article was about the repatriation of Tornedalian, Kven, Lantalaiset and Sámi remains. The reindeer land issue is addressed in DN in the perspective of the local population, the different Sámi groups, the hunting and angling communities, but not a single written article focuses on the perspective of the Tornedalian minority. There are other similar examples. The offering of content, programmes and articles in Meänkieli is extremely poor. The media producing most broadcast hours in the minority language Meänkieli is Swedish Radio, followed by Swedish Television (SVT) and Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company (UR), where the number of hours of broadcast content (first broadcast, not counting repeats) in Meänkieli is unacceptably low and has been at a practically unchanged level for a number of years. SVT broadcast 25 hours of first-time content in Meänkieli in the year 2020. The average is 4 minutes per day. In 2022 the number of hours was unchanged. UR broadcast 5.1 hours of first-time content in Meänkieli in the year 2020. Two years later, the amount of first-time content broadcasts sank on television, but was replaced by web broadcasts so that the total number of hours increased to 6.5 for the whole of the year 2022. This is marginal and unacceptable.

From the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities:

Article 9.4

In the framework of their legal systems, the Parties shall adopt adequate measures in order to facilitate access to the media for persons belonging to National Minorities and in order to promote tolerance and permit cultural pluralism.

Comment: The concrete cases of marginalisation in the media described earlier show that stronger measures are needed on the part of the Government to enable Sweden to live up to this Article of the Framework Convention.

4.3 Modern-day marginalisation through Swedification of place names

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission appointed by the Government for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset¹⁴, which is investigating violations and abuse of this population in the 19th and 20th centuries, has in its work been able to confirm widespread Swedification of Meänkieli place names. Places which historically have had Meänkieli names are today designated with only Swedish, or in some cases, Swedish and Sámi names. One example is *Nikkulahti* in Kiruna Municipality, which today is signposted according to the Sámi name *Nikkaluokta*. It is marginalisation and belittling of the Meänkieli-speaking minority to actively de-select the historical Meänkieli place name. It is also a discriminatory action which turns minorities against each other. In Kiruna Municipality there has also been dialogue about Swedification of Meänkieli and Finnish names in the municipality in modern times with a view to making it easier for Blue Light personnel to get to the right address.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part III, p.36:

The Place-name Advisory Board is a consultant body within the Land Survey. In addition to the Land Survey, the board includes representatives from the Institute for Languages and Folklore, the Swedish National Heritage Board, the Sámi Parliament, the Swedish Local Heritage Federation, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Swedish Transport Administration and seats of learning. The purpose of the board is to contribute to good place name usage in Sweden.

Comment: There is no Tornedalian, Kven and Lantalaiset representation on the board. This is extraordinary in view of the large Meänkieli-speaking area and the thousands of place names with historical roots linked to the language.

5. Poor economic conditions

Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset have long been severely underfunded in view of the demands made of the Minority and the conditions the Minority would need to enable strengthening, developing and making visible the minority language, culture, identity and history in accordance with its legal protection. Because of the Minority being kept poor in resources it does not have the capacity to stand up against disregard, exclusion and marginalisation in an efficient way. Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset are hampered in many areas of minority policy lobbying. Organisations are often forced to choose a focus for operations in order to achieve results in any area. One constant question is which area is to be prioritised and which should be passed over. Is

¹⁴ The reckoning with historical violations against and abuse of Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset Dir **2020:29**
<https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/c0ecd75da47244128b5210c92e8f926e/uppgorelse-med-historiska-krankningar-and-overgrepp-mot-tornedalingar-kvaner-and-lantalaiset-dir-202029.pdf>

it to be revitalisation, culture-strengthening efforts, spreading awareness or minority policy lobbying?

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part II, p.10:

The objective of the policy on National Minorities is to provide protection for the National Minorities, strengthen their opportunities to exert influence and to support the historical minority languages so as to keep them alive.

Comment: The influence of the Tornedalian National Minority, contrary to being strengthened, has now been weakened. The Minority is not being given acceptable economic conditions to cope with the lobbying work that is required today for an acceptable level of influence and participation. Much of the resources in the case of the nationwide organisation STR-T go towards efforts for inclusion on important matters that affect the Minority, instead of solution-oriented minority-strengthening work with the other affected and included parties. That means that direct language- and culture-strengthening efforts are hampered. The Minority is financially denied influence through reduction in the resources for the Minority's biggest and strongest organisation pursuing active minority policy lobbying at national level through consultation, drafting referral responses and issuing statements. This leads to a systemic fault, where the Minority lacks the power to distribute its funds that the Sámi minority has through the Sámi Parliament. There is a more detailed description in the Association's appeal to the Administrative Court, which was also submitted to the Advisory Committee for information on 1 March 2023.¹⁵ This also affects all other non-Sámi National Minorities, which also receive their earmarked funds distributed by the County Administrative Board in Stockholm County. In times where significant inflation also affects society, this action on the part of the state is nothing less than slow stifling and silencing of the loudest voice in the community of the Tornedalian National Minority. The actions by the state over several years towards the non-Sámi minorities on the issue of resources are in breach of many articles of the Framework Convention and pit minorities against each other by serious discrimination which indicates that any striving for equality exists only on paper. Human rights and protection for the National Minorities through the constitution and international agreements often do not in practice apply to the Tornedalian National Minority. The Government's actions in this respect are in breach of the following articles of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities: Articles 4.1, 4.2, 5.1, 15.¹⁶

On 17 August, a report was presented "*(Minority Policy Account 2022) - how has Sweden managed to care for its National Minorities?*" This report summarises how well Sweden has managed to live up to its commitments towards its National Minorities. It was drafted by the former minority investigator for the state Lennart Rohdin on the remit of the Sweden Finnish Delegation.

From the report *Minority Policy Account*:

Today, the state finances the Sámi Parliament and its bodies in the sum of 60 mSEK annually. In itself, it is in no way excessive, but explains why on the part of the Sámi, there are completely different resources for putting their point of view than the other four non-Sámi minorities possess. To the national organisations for the four non-Sámi minorities, since 2010, the annual contribution has amounted to 6.5 mSEK or 1.5-2 mSEK per minority. Sometimes there has been minor a temporary supplement – as in 2022. It is evident that this in no way enables long-term work to safeguard the

¹⁵ Doc 3 Appeal against decision 811-57821-2022

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<https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/02b946ed1ee747a1a7bf4874fd8d3633/ramkonvention-om-skydd-for-nationella-minoriteter/>

interests of these minorities and minority languages, or to enable mirroring the flood of consultations and referrals from the majority community.

Comment: The report confirms the economic imbalance and injustice that affects the non-Sámi minorities. STR-T shares the author's view that the funding awarded to the Sámi Parliament is not excessive, but that the injustice lies in the small amounts awarded to other minorities. The amount does not give each minority conditions to cope with the demands made of the minority organisations.

From The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (SÖ 2002:2):

Article 15

The Parties shall create the conditions necessary for the effective participation of persons belonging to National Minorities in cultural, social and economic life and in public affairs, in particular those affecting them.

Comment: The National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset is not given conditions as described, since the Minority is kept weak in resources without empowerment to distribute the Minority's earmarked and meagre funding and the Minority is excluded on issues which are of considerable importance to the Minority and affect it.

6. Education and elderly care

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part II, p.7:

The right to preschool and elderly care in minority languages in administrative areas has been strengthened by the provision now stipulating that the whole or a significant part of the activities shall be provided in minority languages, unlike previously where the provision stipulated only the whole or parts of the activity. In addition, an obligation has been introduced to ask custodians if they are interested in preschool education in a minority language when applications for preschool are made to the municipality.

Comment: Strengthening the right to preschool and elderly care in Meänkieli in the administrative area is excellent. That the right shall apply to a significant part instead of merely parts of the activities makes the law much more powerful, but there remains a major need of inspection and follow up. The obligation for the principal to ascertain whether parents are interested in preschool in a minority language is also of considerable importance, but here too there is a need for follow up, since these rights are all too seldom applied in practice, even though there appears to have been an improvement.

The criticised education chain in Sweden still has many shortcomings. Taken overall, no major changes have occurred. Not many of the proposals that Jarmo Lainio presented in *Enquiry into improved opportunities for pupils to develop their National Minority language (U 2016:07)*¹⁷ have been implemented.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part II, p.9:

¹⁷ https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/1223a145243f4c0aa25c0f3dc55b6965/sou-2017_91_webb.pdf

*In order to increase access to tuition in the National Minority languages in compulsory school, compulsory school for pupils with learning disabilities, special school, Sámi school, upper secondary school, and upper secondary school for pupils with special needs, the Government decided on 22 December 2016 to appoint a special rapporteur to propose measures in the area (ToR 2016/116). On 15 November 2017, the inquiry, which adopted the name *Utredningen om förbättrade möjligheter för elever att utveckla sitt nationella minoritetsspråk [Inquiry into improving opportunities for pupils to develop their National Minority language] (SOU 2017:91)*, on 15 November 2017 submitted its findings, *Nationella minoritetsspråk i skolan – förbättrade förutsättningar till undervisning och revitalisering (National Minority languages in school – improved conditions for education and revitalisation) (SOU 2017:91)*.*

Comment: The enquiry was authored by Jarmo Lainio and was extremely well received by the National Minorities. The proposals were a response to the criticism the Council of Europe directed at Sweden for shortcomings in education in National Minority languages. The proposals were clear and very good, but they have not been addressed. The opportunities given to pupils to study Meänkieli in compulsory school vary greatly from one municipality to another. The teaching time can be anything between 30 and 120 min of Meänkieli per week. The language lessons are in many cases placed outside normal school hours, which prolongs the child's school days, and if the child needs to take a school bus home, makes the option practically impossible. Pupils must either stay on after school finishes and study Meänkieli or begin their school day early in the morning before the other children arrive at school. It is still common that a shortage of teachers is cited to avoid organising mother tongue teaching in Meänkieli. There is no system for following up municipal efforts to find teachers, making this a big loophole through which the school can avoid organising mother tongue teaching in Meänkieli. In some cases, school heads cite a limited budget as a reason for not offering Meänkieli in school.

The shortage of teaching materials in Meänkieli is still considerable, which increases the work burden on Meänkieli teachers, since producing exercises and materials is time-consuming. The high work burden in turn reduces the attractiveness of Meänkieli teaching posts. In many cases, Meänkieli teachers are offered a fragmented post comprising very small percentage of a full-time post, making it a lot less attractive, and the school head can then refer to the fact that no teacher has applied for the post. There are cases where Meänkieli pupils have been required to study together with Finnish pupils and with teachers who have a limited command of Meänkieli, resulting in the pupil abandoning Meänkieli instruction. It is not unusual for Meänkieli pupils at different levels and of different ages to be grouped together, leading to teaching that is not adapted to every pupil.

Remote teaching is becoming more frequent, for better or worse. It gives the pupil the possibility of a qualified teacher, to escape studying the language as a sole pupil and to be placed in a group at the right knowledge level. The disadvantage is in particular the sensitive technology. Access to mentors and tutors on-site varies. A lot of time is devoted to solving technical problems, which ultimately can lead to the pupils losing interest in studying the language.

From Sweden's Fifth Report:

In administrative areas, information about rights is commonly provided to parents in preschool and school, and to the elderly in connection with applications for elderly care. Outside administrative areas, information is also usually provided to parents through the school.

Comment: The Association experiences somewhat improved visibility in this area, but not to the extent that one can call dissemination of information a frequent occurrence. There is a vast

variation between administrative municipalities and there are still numerous cases where parents/relatives are not aware of these rights.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part I, p. 2:

These rights include individuals having the right to use their minority language in contacts with administrative authorities whose geographical sphere of activity coincides completely or partly with the administrative area of the minority language; and the individual's right to preschool and to receive the whole or a significant part of elderly care in their minority language.

Comment: The mentioned rights strengthen the status of the minority language – if they are actually put into practice. The problem is they are not observed by the principals. Municipalities all too flippantly refer to the lack of linguistically qualified personnel without any accountability for efforts they have made to find suitable personnel. Within elderly care there are many personnel who do not have Swedish as their first language, and this in itself sets a challenge to be dealt with. The requirement to learn the minority language is thereby a less reasonable one. There are cases where Meänkieli and Finnish-speaking care receivers in elderly care cannot communicate with the personnel, which creates insecurity and impacts the well-being of the care receivers, especially if they also suffer from some form of dementia, which is common, and do not remember where they are, or they do not recognise the personnel. Communication problems risk leading to deterioration in the well-being of care receivers.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part II, p. 9:

The provision that obliges municipalities in the administrative areas to offer children whose custodians request it a place in preschool where the whole or a significant part of the activities are in Finnish, Meänkieli and Sámi has also been transferred from the Minorities Act to the Education Act (2010:800).

Comment: This transfer of provisions to the Education Act is an excellent measure to make clear the obligations of the administrative municipalities. One municipality where this measure functions well is Luleå Municipality, but there are few administrative municipalities that follow this good example. There are still municipalities within the Meänkieli administrative area where the municipality does not offer a place in preschool where all or a significant part of the activities are provided in Meänkieli, but instead refers to the lack of linguistically qualified personnel.

From Sweden's Fifth Report Part III, p.19:

In 2019, the Institute for Language and Folklore and the Sámi Parliament were commissioned to submit proposals for the development of an action programme for the preservation of Sweden's National Minority languages.

Comment: The Institute for Language and Folklore did excellent work to put forward many, almost 80, good suggestions to strengthen and preserve the National Minority languages. Only six of them were adopted.

7. Health and medical care

Healthcare in a National Minority language within administrative areas is still today not self-evident in practice. In cases where STR-T has been in dialogue with language bearers and relatives

of care receivers, the Association has ascertained that it is not a question of a lack of personnel with command of the language, but it is more an organisational issue in which the language has received low priority. It is not unusual that care receivers are obliged to bring a relative or somebody else as an interpreter. The scientific basis for enabling an assessment of the state of health of the Tornedalian minority is non-existent. No ongoing research on the subject is available.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part III, p.14:

In 2020 the (Public Health) Agency, together with the National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Association of Tornedalians (STR-T), prepared a questionnaire and a question template for interviews aimed at monitoring the health of the Tornedalians using various methods.

Comment: In this work, the Association perceives that there has been a very good dialogue. The Minority has been a participant in the work in a satisfactory way and has had influence as an expert party. In the work to monitor the health of Tornedalians, the Public Health Agency and the National Board of Health and Welfare have been role models in the inclusion of the affected parties.

8 Government communication to the Riksdag *Fresh Start for a Strengthened Minority Policy*

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part I, p.2

*In June 2018, the Government submitted to the Riksdag a written communication entitled *Fresh Start for a Strengthened Minority Policy* (Comm. 2017/18:282). This written communication constituted the second part of the revised minority policy and the starting point for continued efforts.¹⁸*

Comment: The steps the Government has taken in the work to strengthen minority policy have been welcomed by the Minority. The establishment of a language centre is long-awaited. However the lack of Minority influence and participation has been less than satisfactory. In Sweden's Fifth Report to the Council of Europe under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the Government states that there is a need for long-term work to strengthen the National Minority languages and culture, at the same time as it chooses to put a time limit on funding for the non-Sámi language centres to just three years, something which gives concern to the affected minorities. STR-T hopes that the Government will put the language centre for Meänkieli on a permanent footing, as well as the other time-limited language centres, in the same way as it has done with the Sámi language centres.

Much of the ambitions in the communication are still treading water. The Government has not yet addressed the entire second part and in some respects the effect has not been the desired one.

From the communication *Fresh Start for a Stronger Minority Policy*:

3.3.5 *The organisations of the National Minorities*

¹⁸ <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/1714b43194a84a409955192b48147374/nystart-for-en-starkt-minoritetspolitik-skr.-201718282.pdf>

Government assessment: *The National Minorities' organisations are highly significant to the implementation of minority policy, both as experts on their own situation and as important representatives of the minorities.*

Organisation grants to national organisations representing the National Minorities should be increased. Such organisation grants should also be introduced for national organisations representing the Sámi in work with minority policy. The coordination and follow-up authorities should implement measures to increase capacity and to raise knowledge in order to support the organisations.

Comment: In the budget for 2022, an extra 90 mSEK was allocated to strengthen work for National Minorities – a pleasing piece of news that among other things enabled the language centre project. For the national organisations representing National Minorities, the investment was not a particularly large one. As the only national organisation representing Tornedalians that had applied for funding, STR-T received the entire fixed grant for the year 2022 – amounting to 1 300 000 SEK. That meant a modest increase by 455 000 SEK over the previous year's fixed grant, which had long been judged by the organisation to be at the very minimum level. The extra funds for the year 2022 represented a small addition, which inflation has already eaten up, and the effect of significantly strengthening the organisation was lost. The system, whereby funds are distributed to the non-Sámi National Minorities through the County Administrative Board in Stockholm County, is objectionable, since this system in several cases has meant that established national organisations from one year to the next can lose considerable parts of their fixed organisation grant. STR-T has now been hit by this. A more detailed description of the problem can be read in the Association's appeal to the Administrative Court. The document has also been submitted for information to the *Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* on 1 March 2023.¹⁹ That the Government expresses ambitions to strengthen minority organisations at the same time as the Government permits a systemic fault that risks serious consequences to already established non-Sámi minority organisations is reprehensible and does not create the impression of a genuine will to strengthen them.

In the communication *Fresh Start for a Stronger Minority Policy*, the Government expresses, with reference to the Government bill *A Stronger Minority Policy* (prop. 2017/18:199 p. 26–27),²⁰ that the minority policy is to be implemented together with the National Minorities so that they can use their empowerment with genuine opportunities for influence and participation. With reference to problems already described and examples of them, one must simply state that the Government has not succeeded in this. The shortcomings remain.

9. Follow-up system

From Sweden's Fifth Report:

In 2019, the Government enhanced the Act on National Minorities and National Minority Languages. The amendments to the Act were part of an ambition to emphasise and clarify the community's responsibility to ensure the rights of National Minorities. The changes brought about by the reform have already produced results at the local and regional levels and have laid the foundations for further development of our minority policy.

¹⁹ Doc 3 Appeal against decision 811-57821-2022

²⁰ <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/Obd30dc1baee4470b317ae7db82a56f7/en-starkt-minoritetspolitik-prop.-201718199.pdf>

Comment: The enhanced law amendment to make clear the community's responsibility was necessary, but still there remains a need for an efficacious follow-up system, since there is no compliance with the law.

10. Focus on the history of Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset

10.1 The Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part I, p.6:

In 2020, the Government appointed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset, which has been commissioned to disseminate information in order to increase knowledge about the Minority and its historical experiences.

Comment: The appointment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset ²¹ is long-awaited and gratifying. The work of the commission so far has been significant to the Minority in many ways. It has contributed to visibility and increase awareness of the Minority. The Association has noticed increased interest among members on the issues of identity, affiliation and history ever since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission began its work to investigate violations and abuse of the Tornedalian, Kven and Lantalaiset population. However, the commission was underfunded from the start and the timeframe for the commission's work was challenging. Additional directives on time extensions have been issued twice, due to the Corona pandemic and also because of a serious and demanding situation during attempts to carry out the mission according to directives under inadequate conditions. The last-mentioned extension of the mission was administrated at the last minute after strong pressure from both the commission itself and the organisation representing the Minority, STR-T.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part III, p.13:

The Government strives for an inclusive approach and to maintain a continuous dialogue on developments in the area of minorities. One example is the recently appointed Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalais, which includes several Meänkieli-speaking groups.

Comment: The Government's inclusive approach to the heterogeneous identity designation is very positive and shows that in this case it has listened and taken seriously the Minority's own view of identity and affiliation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset is the first cohesive account of the history of the Meänkieli-speaking minority. It is however limited to the recent history of the Minority and for that reason there remains a major need of scientific research into the early history of Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset.

²¹ <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/c0ecd75da47244128b5210c92e8f926e/uppgorelse-med-historiska-krankningar-and-overgrepp-mot-tornedalingar-kvaner-and-lantalaiset-dir-202029.pdf>

10.2 Disregard of the early history of Tornedalians

Many problems linked to marginalisation, exclusion and disregard of the National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset in contexts and on issues that affect them, due to the fact that the history of the Minority is not taken into consideration. Despite the existence of documentation confirming the very early existence of the Minority and despite the fact that the lack of cohesive historical accounts of the Minority creates difficulties for the Minority with regard to inclusion on different issues, no efforts are made on the part of the Government to investigate this part of the history of Sweden as a whole. No research efforts are initiated into the early history of Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset. This is astonishing in view of the fact that the ethnic group fulfils the criteria for indigenous peoples, and lives and has lived side-by-side with the Sámi minority that has several research institutions and a Sámi research centre. This research addresses the Sámi minority. This means that the picture of history that emerges is selective and excludes an entire ethnic group that has lived in the same area through the same eras. If similar research efforts had been made into Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset, the Minority most certainly could not have been excluded from the issues mentioned earlier. The need of research into the paleo-history of the Meänkieli-speaking minority is greater than ever now that different forces in society want to demean and marginalise the historical existence of the Minority. The lack of cohesive history accounts is a threat to the future possibilities of the entire minority to live its culture and keep its language alive. The Swedish Government must act now, and for this to happen, powerful top-down pressure is required.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part II, p.37:

Article 12

12.1 The Parties shall, where appropriate, take measures in the fields of education and research to foster knowledge of the culture, history, language and religion of their National Minorities and of the majority.

Comment: Efforts to research into the National Minority of which there is least public awareness are practically non-existent apart from the investigation into historical violations and abuse which is now being led by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. There is a lack of educational material and cohesive historical research into the Minority, which many times leads to exclusion and marginalisation.

10.3 Education on the history of National Minorities

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part II, p.38:

The syllabuses for compulsory school have recently been revised. As a result of this revision, teaching about the National Minorities is now concentrated to and has been strengthened in primarily the subject of civics. The purpose of this change is to allow more time to be spent on the area by concentrating it to a single school subject.

Comment: The fact that National Minorities were transferred from history teaching to civics is not a positive change in the sense that they are now marginalised in the teaching of Sweden's history. It should be made clear that the National Minorities' history is not something separate, but is part of Sweden's entire history.

Towards the end of 2022, the Living History Forum set up focus groups, where representatives of the National Minorities participate to collect important historical events/phenomena which have affected each minority. The text, comprising in all 20,000 characters, is to be used to for educational purposes by the public and schools. STR-T is highly positive to the work with these focus groups.

11. Other comments on Sweden's Fifth Report

11.1 Omission of Meänkieli variants

In Sweden's Fifth Report, in its background information in *Part 1, Practical arrangements made at national level for following up the results of the fourth monitoring cycle*, the Government refers to footnotes which describe the Romani and the Sámi language variants, but it omits the three variants of Meänkieli.

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part II, p.14:

The Agency's Internet pages on National Minorities have been regularly updated with information on all the minority languages with multiple variants, and up-to-date information about the National Minorities where relevant to the Agency's activities is published on the Agency's intranet.

Comment: This is not correct as regards Meänkieli – in particular as regards variants. The Association does not know of any public authority's website which gives information on the different variants of Meänkieli. There has long been a lack of an information centre to which authorities may turn, which means that much knowledge dissemination and translation work has fallen upon STR-T. The Association has many times, with an already high workload and limited resources, as regards both staff and finances, helped with translation and proofreading, faced with the alternative that the pages would not otherwise be updated with correct facts about the Minority.

11.2 Knowledge raising efforts

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part I, p.5:

The Sámi Parliament and Stockholm County Administrative Board are responsible for measures to spread information and raise knowledge in the municipalities and Government agencies in particular. An extensive development project is currently under way to produce a web-based basic course on the rights of National Minorities. In addition, a toolbox of practical advice and good examples has been developed to support the work of the municipalities and regions in spreading knowledge and in other aspects of their minority policy commission. The responsible authorities also distribute information material to schools.

Comment: STR-T is positive to efforts to raise knowledge about the rights of National Minorities. However, the Association is critical of the fact that the Sámi Parliament, an authority which represents another National Minority and which has acted in a manner which excludes and belittles the Tornedalian National minority, should be knowledge disseminator for all the National Minorities.

11.3 National Library strategy

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part III, p.21:

In December 2020, the Government decided to commission the National Library of Sweden to implement an initiative to make the National Minority libraries into resource libraries for each language group and for Sweden's municipalities.

Comment: The project to strengthen the National Minorities libraries through resource libraries for each minority is extremely welcome, and much-needed. The Association is pleased that this project, for which the Minority has acted over a long period, has become reality.

11.4 Human rights do not apply to everyone

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part III, p.10:

Sweden takes human rights very seriously at both the national and international levels and works to safeguard observance of its international convention obligations.

Comment: STR-T considers that the Government has greatly failed in its commitments under the convention as regards the National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaaset. The Government excludes and marginalises the Minority on issues, at events and in contexts that strongly affect it. By constant exclusion from issues important to the Minority, the Minority's self-image and self-esteem are damaged. This in turn hampers language revitalisation. The Minority's status in society is also damaged. The Minority is not given its justified space, influence and participation on issues that are important to the Minority. The Government disregards the early history of the Minority and thereby belittles the Minority's links to issues to do with early history. The Government keeps the National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaaset unreasonably weak in resources and thereby also without the capacity to work at an acceptable level to strengthen culture, traditions, language and identity. Nor has the Minority the resources to work in a goal-oriented way for influence and participation in all the areas that affect it and where there is a need. As things are today, the Minority has to turn its focus from important issues and areas due to a lack of resources. Human rights do not in practice apply to all National Minorities.

11.5 Polarisation and deepened conflicts

From Sweden's Fifth Report, Part III, p.23:

Article 6

6.1 The Parties shall encourage a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and co-operation among all persons living on their territory, irrespective of those persons' ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity, in particular in the fields of education, culture and the media.

Comment: The negative discrimination and exclusion of the National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaaset from different issues which affect the Minority, from important events and in the media, seriously deepen polarisation and conflicts which historically the state has created between the northern National Minorities. To constantly exclude and marginalise the Minority does not contribute to mutual respect and understanding between parties sharing the same territory. By clear discrimination and the allocation of a position of power over one or more minorities to another minority, the Government deepens polarisation. In many of the described cases in this report, minorities are pitted against each other. It is a dangerous way to operate, and the state does not seem to have taken this seriously enough.

12. Conclusion

With reference to the content presented in this report, it is beyond doubt that Sweden is failing to live up to many of its commitments linked to the ratification of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. With the inadequate economic conditions, the obvious and systematic exclusion, belittling and marginalisation of the National Minority Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset with regard to events and issues that affect it, the National Association of Swedish Tornedalians (STR-T) is greatly concerned over the future of the Minority. It is a matter of the survival of Meänkieli. It is a matter of the visibility of the Tornedalian, Kven and Lantalaiset culture. It is a matter of the strong judicial history of the Minority which has been eclipsed. It is a matter of the self-identity of future generations and their feeling of belonging. If the present Government does not break a trend that has lasted for many years to keep the Minority weak in resources, marginalised and without significant influence over minority policy, then the Minority risks becoming the victim of serious consequences, which the Government will need to answer for in the future. Tornedalians, Kvens and Lantalaiset, an estimated 150,000 in number, silenced through assimilation and marginalised in history books, the least known of the Swedish National Minorities. Sweden's current Government has every opportunity to change this – if there is a will. The Minority's most powerful organisation, STR-T, is now severely weakened through reduced funding, and cannot manage to continue pursuing this issue alone.

Pajala 2023-03-17

Inger Junkka

Chair

The National Association of Swedish Tornedalians (STR-T)

Terje Raattamaa

Deputy Chair

The National Association of Swedish Tornedalians (STR-T)

Eva Kvist

Executive Manager

The National Association of Swedish Tornedalians (STR-T)

Mailing list

To

The Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the National Minorities, Council of Europe

Secretariat of the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the National Minorities

Council of Europe
minorities.fcnm@coe.int

Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Secretariat of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

minlang.secretariat@coe.int

Copy to

Prime Minister

Prime Minister's Office

statsradsberedningen.registrator@regeringskansliet.se

Minister for Culture

Ministry of Culture

kulturdepartementet.registrator@regeringskansliet.se

Minister for Rural Affairs

Ministry of Rural Affairs and Infrastructure

li.registrator@regeringskansliet.se

Chair of the Committee on Cultural Affairs and spokesperson for National Minorities

Committee on Cultural Affairs, Riksdag

amanda.lind@riksdagen.se

Chair, Committee on the Constitution

Committee on the Constitution, Riksdag

ida.karkiainen@riksdagen.se

Principal Secretary, Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Tornedalian, Kvens and Lantalaishet t

Government Offices

anna-lena.sjolund@regeringskansliet.se

Equality Ombudsman

DO

do@do.se

Director, Institute for Human Rights and Chair of the Board Institute for Human Rights

registrator@mrinstitutet.se

Principal secretary, Committee on Reindeer Lands

Government Offices

lisa.englund.krafft@GovernmentOffices.se

Isak From

Member, Committee on Reindeer Lands

isak.from@riksdagen.se

Jakob Olofsgård

Member, Committee on Reindeer Lands
jakob.olofsgard@riksdagen.se

Olof Johansson Rago

Member, Committee on Reindeer Lands
oloft@oloft.com

Emilia Töyrä

Member, Committee on Reindeer Lands
emilia@maunu.se

John Widegren

Member, Committee on Reindeer Lands
john.widegren@riksdagen.se

Linda Modig

Member, Committee on Reindeer Lands
linda.modig@centerpartiet.se

Kjell-Arne Ottoson

Member, Committee on Reindeer Lands
kjell-arne.ottosson@riksdagen.se

Michael Rubbestad

Member, Committee on Reindeer Lands
michael.rubbestad@riksdagen.se

Jessica Wetterling

Member, Committee on Reindeer Lands
jessica.wetterling@riksdagen.se

Director/CEO Swedish Television

Public Service, SVT
hanna.stjarne@svt.se

Acting CEO, Utbildningsradion

Public Service, Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company UR
per.bergkrantz@ur.se