

Appendix II: Comments by the Swedish Authorities

Ministry of Justice Sweden

2003-04-11



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Comments from Sweden on the report of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

Sweden welcomes the report of the Committee of Experts. It constitutes support for Sweden's efforts to promote the national minorities and the minority languages. Many of the issues raised by the Committee are in line with the work carried out in Sweden.

General comments

Local and regional governments

The Committee has noticed that the practical implementation of a number of obligations under the Charter is dependent on measures taken by regional and local authorities, mainly the municipalities. The Committee has observed that the lack of such measures in some instances has led to shortcomings in the fulfillment of certain obligations.

The Government has addressed the problem and stressed that if Sweden's minority policy goals are to be realized, the needs and interests of all national minorities must be taken into account at all levels of the public administration, from central authorities to municipalities and county councils. In order to increase knowledge of the minority policy and discuss the role of the municipalities in the protection of national minorities and minority languages the Government, in cooperation with the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, will organize a conference to which all Swedish municipalities are invited. The conference will take place in Stockholm in May 2003. There will also be a regional conference for the local and regional authorities in Norrbotten in the autumn 2003.

Education

As from the 1 March 2003 the National Agency for Education has been divided into two authorities, one for inspection and supervision (the National Agency for Education) and one for development (the Authority for School Development). One of the main tasks for the new Authority for School Development the coming years will be improving the conditions for education in segregated areas. Strengthening the mother tongue instruction, for example by bilingual classes, will be one part of the work.

The National Agency for Education in its report on mother tongue instruction, delivered in May 2002, undertakes to spread information about the value of mother tongue instruction from an individual perspective and from a society perspective. In different teaching materials the agency will highlight the importance of mother tongue in order to enhance the quality of education.

Specific comments

29. The Norrbotten County Administrative Board has been commissioned to examine the consequences of a possible extension of the administrative district for Sami in order to comprise also some local authorities in the south parts of the traditional Sami language area, the South Sami area.

38. The Government has established a Council for Roma issues. It is chaired by the minister responsible for minority issues and includes 16 permanent members representing all larger Roma groups residing in Sweden. The main task for the council is to advise the Government and thereby improve the situation of the Roma within various fields.

42. In order to counteract the lack of trained interpreters in the Romani language a one year long education in interpreting has recently been arranged in the city of Gothenburg. At present there are 15 young Roma attending this education.

51. In some municipalities there is no doubt a competition between municipal schools and independent Swedish Finnish schools. However the Swedish authorities do not have the impression that this is the case everywhere. In other municipalities there is a good and fruitful cooperation between the municipality and the Swedish Finnish school.

It should also be noted that, according to the School Ordinance, bilingual education for Finnish-speaking pupils is possible for all years in compulsory school (9 years). For other languages bilingual education is possible for the first six years.

54. The Government has commissioned the National Agency for Higher Education to investigate the situation for certain language courses at the universities. The National Agency for Higher Education recently presented its report. One of the proposals is that steps should be taken to promote study and research on Romani and Yiddish at university level.

66, 178 and 295. Information of any criticism of the limit of 50 % for bilingual education or any proposals for changes has not reached the Government Offices. Nor has this issue been raised at meetings between the ministers and representatives for the national minorities.

69, 183 and 299. The Norrbotten County Administrative Board has been given the task to follow up how the governmental grant has been used during 2003. The Board will particularly follow up how awareness has been raised concerning the right to receive pre-school education and elderly care in Sami, Finnish and Meänkieli, to what extent requests have been made, how these have been met and what costs have occurred.

96, 209, 323. The report in 2001 from the National Agency for Education is part of a regular monitoring of minority languages. Finnish has been monitored before at several occasions. For the National Agency for Education as for the Sami school board monitoring minority languages is a natural undertaking as part of the general follow-up responsibility of goal achievement in schools.

103, 214 and 330. According to the Government Bill 1998/99:143 the possibility to refuse a request to use Sami, Finnish or Meänkieli on the ground "improper purposes" is to be used very restrictively, for example when it is obvious that the request has been made in order to protract the legal proceedings.