

POLISH JOURNAL *of* EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

ISSN 2657-3528

2018, Vol. I (LXXI)

DOI: 10.2478/poljes-2018-0015

Norwegian policy on sami language learning and preservation

**Olga Shchukina¹, Maksim Zadorin², Ivan Savelev³,
Irina Ershova⁴, Tatiana Konopleva⁵**

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the government policy of Norway, one of the countries that has significantly succeeded in solving ethnocultural problem. It introduces the main stages of the Norwegian government policy towards the Sami people. Special attention is given to the problem of preserving the cultural identity of the Sami and the status of the Sami language in Norwegian society. The article presents the problem of learning and preserving the Sami language through the analysis of Norwegian official state legislation which constitutes the methodological basis of the article. It also considers a number of local and international conventions and acts that are designed to protect Sami rights, as well as the effects these conventions and acts have on the status and situation of the Sami language in Norway. The current status of the Sami language and educational perspectives are considered in a comparative and historical framework. The results presented in the article are intended to raise awareness of cultural identity and inequality of educational opportunities based on ethnic minority background.

KEYWORDS:

Sami, Sami languages, indigenous peoples, language learning.

-
- 1 Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Arkhangelsk, Russia.
E-MAIL: o.borskaya@narfu.ru
 - 2 Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Arkhangelsk, Russia.
E-MAIL: m.zadorin@narfu.ru
 - 3 Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Arkhangelsk, Russia.
E-MAIL: i.savelev@narfu.ru
 - 4 Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Arkhangelsk, Russia.
E-MAIL: i.ershova@narfu.ru
 - 5 Northern (Arctic) Federal University named after M.V. Lomonosov, Arkhangelsk, Russia.
E-MAIL: t.konopleva@narfu.ru

Introduction

There are about 370 million indigenous people who live in 90 countries worldwide. Approximately 90,000 of them constitute one of the distinct groups, namely the Sami, who inhabit the northernmost parts of Norway (Finnmark), Sweden (Norrbotten), Finland (Lapland) and Russia (Murmansk region). Of these, about 50,000 Sami people live in Norway.

Having gained its independence from Denmark in 1814 Norway started work on unifying the country and all spheres of its society. The Sami people were worst affected by this policy which in the 1850s acquired the name of Norwegianization. Promoting the Norwegian language and culture this policy in many ways led to the loss of the Sami language and cultural identity of the Sami people. Only after World War II did a more liberal attitude to the Sami people and their rights start to appear. Nowadays Norwegian policy towards the Sami can be described as cultural pluralism: the Sami rights to their own language have been restored and they can freely develop their traditional culture (Kotlova, 2015, p. 16). However, a more critical perspective of Norwegian state policy exposes a great number of problems and challenges that the Sami people, their language and culture are still subjected to.

Historical background

The Sami people are considered to be a minority group that has acquired a peculiar position within Norwegian society. On the one hand, they fell under the policy of Norwegianization and were threatened with extinction being deprived of their right to self-determination. On the other hand, the Sami people now are a recognized indigenous group that has its own language, traditions, parliament (the so-called Sami parliament) and, therefore, enjoys a special legal status as opposed to Kvens who are regarded not as the indigenous people of Norway, but rather as its ethnic minority (Rusinov, 2010, p. 574).

This policy fits into the concept of “positive discrimination” (or “affirmative actions”), when certain social, as well as racial and ethnic groups receive certain privileges until they are reinstated. This principle is stated in Section 4 of Article 1 of the 1965 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:

- “4. Special measures taken for the sole purpose of securing adequate advancement of certain racial or ethnic groups or individuals requiring such protection as may be necessary in order to ensure such groups or individuals equal enjoyment or exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms shall not be deemed racial discrimina-

tion, provided, however, that such measures do not, as a consequence, lead to the maintenance of separate rights for different racial groups and that they shall not be continued after the objectives for which they were taken have been achieved" (International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965, p. 2).

We think that such a policy also generally met the idea of the International Labour Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention No. 107 concerning the Protection and Integration of Indigenous and Other Tribal and Semi-Tribal Populations in Independent Countries as of June 26, 1957 and was not really meant to preserve and develop cultural, educational and language identity as much as it was meant to integrate the Sami people into the general way of life (Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, 1957).

The relatively recent recognition of both the Sami people and their language is not accidental. The dissolution of the union between Denmark and Norway and the adoption of a constitution by Norway in 1814 accelerated the process of creating a modern unitary state and unifying all aspects of the life of Norwegian society. For the Sami, these changes meant exposure to the so-called Norwegianization policy, which was designed to assimilate the Sami into Norwegian society.

The policy of Norwegianization can be divided into several stages each of which has affected the lives of the Sami population in a particular way. However, the most profound changes and the strictest measures of the policy concerned the Sami language and its position in Norwegian society. In 1851 the Norwegian parliament established the Finnefondet fund which was aimed at promoting the Norwegian language among the Sami people. The basic premise was to allocate funds for the Norwegianization measures. The education system was affected most of all: teachers in the northern municipalities who followed the instructions for introducing and teaching the Norwegian language to the Sami received a salary increment and other bonuses. Until 1880, the use of the Sami language was still allowed in some areas, for example, in religious instruction. Therefore, the period from 1851 to 1880 can be called a transition phase, after which the policy of assimilation unfolded with even greater scope (Steinlien, 1989, p. 3).

In 1880 the assimilation policy was centralized and acquired a very tough form. The use of the Sami language in schools was even more limited, and since 1889 it has been officially banned. A new act of 1898, Wexelsenplakaten, once again legitimized the previously adopted guidelines and principles of the Norwegianization policy. At the same time, the prohibition on the use of the Sami language was extended beyond schooling. In 1902 an Act of Parliament was issued, according to which only Norwegians, as well as those who could speak, read and write in Norwegian, were entitled to take on lease or purchase land from the state.

A more liberal attitude towards the Sami population began to develop only in the post-war period. The government committee dealing with education issues in Norway, Samordningsnemda for skoleverket, gradually began to propose measures to revise the policy of Norwegianization and strengthen the position of the Sami language and culture. The reasons for this were different, these included: World War II, public debate on human rights, condemnation of discrimination and the spread of European liberal ideas. Since 1959, Norway's public policy towards the Sami population has reached a new level, namely economic and cultural integration, or integration pluralism, and since 1984 to the present – cultural pluralism (Steinlien, 1989, p. 4). The policy of Norwegianization has become a thing of the past. In 1956 the Nordic Sami Council, known now as the Sami Council, was formed uniting the Sami of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia to promote their rights. However, of all these countries, only Norway has undertaken international obligations to protect the Sami language through ratification of the International Labor Organization Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries in 1989. According to Article 28 of the Convention in question "children belonging to the peoples concerned shall, wherever practicable, be taught to read and write in their own indigenous language or in the language most commonly used by the group to which they belong" (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989). Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure that indigenous peoples are aware of their rights and obligations, which can be provided by means of translations and communication in their mother tongue.

1989 was marked by another significant event for the entire Sami population in Norway: the inauguration of Sametinget, the Sami Parliament of Norway. The Sami Parliament is an elective body of the Sami, designed to address culture and education issues. In 1997, King Harald V of Norway, speaking at the official opening of the session of the Sami Parliament, made one of the most important statements for the indigenous people of Norway about the coexistence of the Sami and Norwegians as integral parts of Norwegian society. Harald V apologized for „unfair treatment of the Sami people through the brutal policy of Norwegianization“ (Villadsen, 2014, p. 35). In 2000, the Norwegian Parliament, Storting, founded the Sami people's foundation to strengthen the Sami language and culture and to compensate for the damage caused by the rigid policy of Norwegianization.

Status of the Sami Language and Educational Policy Perspectives

The Sami language is a Finno-Ugric language which is mostly spoken in northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. There are 10 Sami dialects that do not depend on state borders but extend beyond them: Southern, Ume, Pite, Lule, Northern, Inari,

Skolt, Akkala, Kildin and Ter Sami. Some of the dialects are more widespread than the others. For example, North Sami is the most widespread Sami dialect in Norway but at the same time is considered to be an endangered one according to UNESCO's red list of endangered languages. Some of the dialects, Skolt, Pite and Ume Sami in particular, have very few speakers left and are often recognized as extinct ones (Action Plan for Sami Languages, 2009, p. 18).

When speaking of the Sami language it is important to mention its variability. G. Kostina says that there are 55 dialects of which, for example, Kola Sami speak four, namely Skolt, Akkala, Ter and Kildin languages (Kostina, 2012, p. 154). The linguistic differentiation of the Sami language depends on various factors such as place of birth, belonging to a particular state, or occupation. This aspect does not contribute to the development of intercultural communication among Sami groups.

Analyzing the situation in Russia in which among others there live the Sami people it is necessary to note that in accordance with Article 68 of the constitution of the Russian Federation the Russian language shall be a state language of the whole territory of the Russian Federation, however Section 3 of the named Article guarantees to all of the peoples of the Russian Federation the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development. Therefore, within the framework of this article, we find it relevant to study the educational policy of the Russian Federation aimed at the implementation of this norm. A number of historical aspects negatively affected both the Sami culture and their language; such as the forced relocation of the Sami people, forced integration into Russian-speaking society and attempts to teach them the Russian language. As late as in the 1930s, subjects in schools on the Kola Peninsula were taught in Sami. However, the postwar years saw a policy of Russification of the Sami people, which led to the gradual loss of their writing and the language itself as such. Today, the problem of the renovation, maintenance, preservation and development of the Sami language is still relevant.

The following can serve as an example. The website of the Government of the Murmansk region provides information on the formation of the task team which is supposed to develop curricular and didactic materials for teaching the Sami language in the educational institutions of the Murmansk region, the Plan of the Development of Curricular and Didactic Materials for Teaching the Sami Language in the Educational Institutions of the Murmansk Region . The media has presented a number of publications about a Sami Culture Week which took place in educational institutions and gave a unique opportunity to get acquainted with Sami culture, music, traditions, Sami folklore and fiction about Sami life as part of lessons at school. The project "Life of the Indigenous Peoples of the North. The Sami people" has been launched on the internet . The publication "The experience of the Murmansk region in the field of pre-school education for children of the indigenous peoples" presents statistics according

to which 100 children of Sami nationality studied in preschool educational institutions of the Murmansk region in 2016–2017.

It should be noted that the main emphasis of the educational programs is on the development of intercultural competence and speaking ability in Sami among schoolchildren as well as the development of one's personality based on the national culture.

Norway gives the Sami people quite a favorable legal status. The Sami were recognized as "indigenous peoples" in Norway in 1988 and received special rights and protection from the state. The recognition of the Sami as indigenous peoples occurred through the adoption by the national parliament of Norway of an amendment to the Constitution of the Kingdom of Norway – the main document of the state. The normative framework for Norway's policy regarding the Sami is the following normative legal acts (Yudin, 2011, p. 185).

The Norwegian Constitution which proclaims the legal, political and moral duty of the state to create conditions and a favorable environment in order to enable the Sami people in Norway to safeguard and develop the Sami language, culture and way of life, as well as to ensure their protection. The state adopted a special law „The Sami Act“ (Act of 12 June 1987 No. 56 concerning the Sameting (the Sami parliament) and other Sami legal matters) which enshrines the special rights of the Sami people. This act established the Sami Parliament – a nation-wide organ elected by and among the Sami population, funded and supported by the state, and in this way regulates its election, business and activities (Ch. 1, § 1–2 – 1–4). The business of the Sameting is any matter that in the view of the Sami particularly affects their rights and interests (Ch. 2, § 2–1), including distribution of allocations among the Sami organizations as well as allocation of funds for the development and maintenance of their culture, economy, language (Ch. 2, § 2–1).

It is also important to note that the Sami and Norwegian languages are accorded equal status (Ch. 1, § 1–5), which makes it obligatory to translate statutes and regulations of particular interest to the Sami population into Sami. Furthermore, other announcements by public bodies and forms to be used in the administrative district are available in both Sami and Norwegian (Ch. 3, § 3–2).

The Sami Act states that any person is entitled to a reply from a local or regional public body in the administrative district in Sami (Ch. 3, § 3–3). The Sami Act describes in details the rules of using the Sami and Norwegian languages in the judicial system, health and social sector and even church services (Ch. 3, § 3–4 – 3–6). Any person is entitled to learn Sami. And employees in a public body in the administrative district are entitled to leave with pay in order to acquire a knowledge of Sami when the said body is in need of such knowledge (Ch. 3, § 3–7 – 3–8). The King may decide to extend a number of the bodies obliged to provide the opportunity to communicate in Sami

(Ch. 3, § 3–10). Also, The Sami Language Council has been established in accordance with The Sami Act (Ch. 3, § 3–12) (The Sami Act, 1987).

Thus, the state has created as favourable as possible conditions for the unhindered interaction of the Sami people with all the state, political and social structures in Sami, which has had a positive impact on its preservation and development, and undoubtedly meets the requirements of Article 13 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which emphasises the rights of indigenous peoples to revitalise, use and transmit their native language, as well as the obligation of the state to ensure their right to participate in all political, administrative, judicial and other proceedings of the country through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means (Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007).

Starting from 2008 the Norwegian Government put forward a number of so-called White Papers concerning Sami policy. White Paper No. 28 (2007–2008), “Sami Politics”, outlines the most challenging issues regarding the status of the Sami languages in Norway. White Paper No. 35 (2007–2008), “Objectives and Purpose”, further strengthens the need to secure the future of the Sami languages by means of a new language policy. At the same time, White Paper No. 11 (2008–2009), “The Teacher – role and education”, focuses on the role of Sami teacher training programmes.

In response to concerns over the Sami languages expressed in White Papers the Norwegian Government proposed an Action Plan for the Sami Languages in 2009. The main goal of the plan of action is to provide all necessary conditions to increase the number of active users of the Sami languages (Action Plan for Sami Languages, 2009, p. 8). This Action Plan for Sami Languages presents a variety of strategies and measures which can help to reach the suggested goal. The first set of measures applies to Sami Language learning on different levels: kindergartens, primary, secondary and tertiary education. Special attention is given to the development of teaching materials in Sami and the organization of teacher training programmes (Action Plan for Sami Languages, 2009, p. 25). Increasing the use of the Sami language is another important objective proposed in the Action Plan. Its main idea is to preserve the Sami language as a means of communication not only in everyday life and work but in all spheres of society including contacts with public services (Action Plan for Sami Languages, 2009, p. 41). Finally, it is suggested that Sami should be made visible to society through place signs, newspapers, radio, TV, literature, films and other available means that can raise Sami language awareness within the Norwegian society.

When it comes to educational policy, Norway’s Education Act states that all pupils attending primary and lower secondary school in the regions which count as the Sami area are entitled to receive tuition in Sami. Outside the Sami area such tuition is possible if there are ten or more pupils in the group (Education Act, 2014). This provision is consistent with Article 14 of the UN Declaration, which encourages ensuring that

indigenous peoples get education in their own language and in accordance with their cultural traditions. All these provisions are reflected in the draft of the Nordic Sami Convention (Nordic Sami Convention, n.d.).

However, Norwegian Sami specialists admit that there are very few native speakers left in the country and the gradual loss of the language is being observed. Besides, due to a large number of dialects many native speakers do not understand each other. This also makes it much more difficult to revitalise the language. Practically, the language is taught at the Sami University of Applied Sciences but is not included in the school curriculum.

Conclusions

It seems that among the states where the Sami people live, it is Norway's legislation that provides the largest degree of self-government and the possibility of enjoying cultural rights, including teaching the Sami language and its preservation. The policy of Norwegianization has become a thing of the past. Norwegian public policy towards the Sami population has reached a new level which can now be characterized as cultural pluralism.

Apart from the national legislation, the Nordic Sami Convention, which consists of Norway, Finland and Sweden – the Nordic Council countries, is of the greatest importance for the indigenous Sami people. This convention largely duplicates the provisions of the ILO Convention No. 169 related to the Sami rights to self-determination, self-government, land, water and biological resources, the right to practice traditional labour, to preserve and develop their traditions, language, culture, and international cooperation, which complicates the process of its ratification. However, the adoption of this very document is the key to the effective implementation and protection of the rights of the indigenous Sami people on the territory of the state. It should be noted that Russia is not a member of this convention, which means that its provisions do not apply to the Kola Sami, who are an integral part of all the Sami peoples.

At the same time, some peculiarities of educational policy aimed at the revitalization and preservation of the Sami language should be taken into consideration. Presently, specialists in the Sami language state that a small number of Sami native speakers makes the process of Sami language revitalization rather challenging. It has to do with the fact that more than 66% of Sami live in rural areas, which also contributes to certain difficulties in creating conditions for the support of their native language. Another problem that has a negative impact on this issue is a lack of funding. The question of teacher training, including native Sami-speaking teachers has not been addressed either. These challenges require special attention and quick measures. One

of the recent proposed solutions is Executive Order on Establishing the Foundation for the Preservation and Study of the Native Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation signed by the President of Russia on October 26, 2018. Although Russia has not signed the ILO Convention No. 169 and the Nordic Sami Convention, internal political, legal and managerial mechanisms will be created to protect the language rights of the Sami people as part of the Sami cultural heritage in Scandinavia and on the Kola Peninsula. This experience of state foundation establishment could also be useful for the Norwegian Sami.

References

- Kostina, G.V. (2012). Etnokul'turnye aspekty funktsionirovaniya saamskogo yazika na kol'skom polyostrove [Ethnocultural aspects of the Sami language functioning in the Kola Peninsula]. *Trudy Karel'skogo nauchnogo tsentra RAN*, 4, 153–157.
- Kotlova, E.S. (2015). Maneuvering between icebergs: ethnic policy models in Norway. *Arctic and North*, 21, 15–28. Retrieved from: <http://www.arcticandnorth.ru/upload/uf/3b8/aan21.pdf> (accessed: November 22, 2018).
- International Labour Organization. (1957). *Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention, No. 107*. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C107 (accessed: November 22, 2018).
- International Labour Organization. (1989). *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, No. 169. Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries*. Retrieved from: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169 (accessed: November 22, 2018).
- Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation. (1987). *The Sami Act. Act of 12 June 1987 No. 56 concerning the Sameting (the Sami parliament) and other Sami legal matters (the Sami Act)*. Retrieved from: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/the-sami-act/id449701/> (accessed: November 22, 2018).
- Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation. (2014). *Education Act. Act relating to Primary and Secondary Education*. Retrieved from: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/dokumenter/education-act/id213315/> (accessed: November 22, 2018).
- Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation. (n.d.). *Nordic Sami Convention*. Retrieved from: https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/aid/temadokumenter/sami/sami_samekonv_engelsk.pdf (accessed: November 22, 2018).
- Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion. (2009). *Action Plan for Sami Languages*. Retrieved from: https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/fad/vedlegg/sami/hp_2009_samisk_sprak_engelsk.pdf (accessed: November 22, 2018).
- Rusinov, A.N. (2010). Kveny: istoriya razvitiya i sovremennoe sostoyanie [Kvens: history of development and current status] *Skandinavskie chteniya 2008 goda*. Etnograficheskie i kul'turno-istoricheskie aspekty (pp. 567–574). St. Petersburg: MAE RAN. Retrieved from: http://www.kunstkamera.ru/files/lib/978-5-88431-187-9/978-5-88431-187-9_49.pdf (accessed: November 22, 2018).

- Steinlien, O. (1989). The Sami law: a change of Norwegian government policy toward the Sami minority. *Can J Native Stud*, 9(1), 1–14.
- United Nations/Department of economic and social affairs. (2007). United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html> (accessed: November 22, 2018).
- United Nations/Human Rights/Office of the High Commissioner. (1965). International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx> (accessed: November 22, 2018).
- Villadsen, L.S. (2014). More than a nice ritual: Official apologies as a rhetorical act in need of theoretical re-conceptualization. In: H. Van Belle, K. Rutten, P. Gillaerts, D. Van De Mierop & B. Van Gorp, (Eds.), *Let's talk politics: new essays on deliberative rhetoric* (pp. 27–43). John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Yudin, V.I. (2011). Gosudarstvennaya politika Norvegii v otnoshenii naroda saami: pravovye osnovaniya i sotsiokul'turnye protivorechiya [Norwegian government policy towards the Sami: legal grounds and socio-cultural contradictions]. *Vlast*, 12, 183–186.