

HITZARGIAK – Languages illuminating each other

Act on the Autonomy of Åland

GENERAL INFORMATION

DATE: 08-03-2016

1	Name	The Government of Åland
2	Language	Swedish
3	Working area (education, communication, teaching, leisure, administration...)	Administration
4	Email and phone number for contact	Elisabeth Naucér elisabeth.naucer@postit.ax
5	Social networks (Webpage, Facebook, Twitter...)	Website: http://www.aland.ax/en/facts-about-aland/aland-autonomy/

DESCRIPTION OF GOOD PRACTICE

1	Description of the practices	Act on the Autonomy of Åland
2	Brief description of the practices	<p>Finland is a bilingual country with two national languages, and two language communities. We do not refer to the different language group as peoples, as the inhabitants of Finland were all state-builders (Finland declared independence in 1917) and is considered to constitute one people. The Swedish speakers (“Finnish-Swedes”) do not constitute a minority with traditional forms for minority protection, but of course they constitute a de facto minority (5,4%) of the population.</p> <p>At the time of declaring independence one part of the country –The Åland Islands– did not want to belong to Finland as their language and culture was Swedish. An overwhelming majority of the population in the islands asked for reunification with their kin-state Sweden, asking for no autonomy or other special measures to be taken than simply reintegration. For the Swedish speakers in Finland it was very important not to lose this part of the population and one of the reasons for creating a bilingual stat was to prove that Finland could accommodate the demands of the population of the Åland Islands.</p> <p>This was also the decision by the League of Nations in Geneva 1921 where the conflict between Finland and Sweden was resolved. Against the will of the Åland population was it decided that the Islands should belong to Finland, but have an extensive autonomy. The Swedish language should forever be guaranteed. All the contacts with the Finnish authorities should only be in Swedish, only Swedish should be the language of tuition in schools financed by the Finnish state or the Åland authorities.</p>

3	Precedents (reasons, needs...)	It was not the question of integration of the Åland inhabitant but internal guarantees for the Swedish language and culture labeled as a form for minority protection. These very strong protective measures were of course a form for compensation for the outcome of the conflict resolution. It is important to keep this in mind when comparing different language arrangements
4	Objectives	Internal guarantees for the Swedish language and culture
5	Main and close working areas	Åland Islands
6	Collaborating entities and their working areas	The Government of Åland, Finland, Sweden
7	Implementation period	1993 (1920)

FILE FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT BEST PRACTICES

8	Expansion (number of influenced people, internal and external expansion...)	Åland Islands, 5,4% of the Finnish population
9	Investment (economic, time, people...)	Political administration
10	Results	<p>Under the Autonomy Act Swedish is the only official language in Åland. This means, among other things, that Swedish is the language used by regional, municipal and State authorities in Åland. Publications and documents sent by Finnish Government agencies to Åland must also be in Swedish.</p> <p>The language of tuition in publicly funded schools is also Swedish.</p>
11	Documentation, reference material	<p>Act on the Autonomy of Åland: http://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/kaannokset/1991/en19911144.pdf See: Chapter 2, Section 7 (Right of domicile on application); Chapter 6 (Language provisions); Chapter 11, Section 75 (State officials).</p>
12	Presentation video	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7UIWd8xWtk
13	Other relevant information	<p>The Swedish speakers in Finland is not a minority and do not benefit from minority status. In Finland Swedish is one of the two national languages. The inhabitants of Åland constitute a minority with different forms for protective measures as a form for compensation for the outcome of the conflict resolution being against the will of the people, and not some form for privileges.</p> <p>Finland is a very interesting example worth studying as it encompasses two different arrangements for protecting the Swedish language. Furthermore the</p>

indigenous Sámi people, speaking several different languages, live in the north of Finland (as well as in Norway and Sweden) and there are several forms for promoting their culture, education, media, etc.

Kin-state and cross border cooperation:

Cross border contacts and official cooperation is very important as i.e. in the Sámi case. The support of a kin-state is equally important, but sometimes very delicate. Sweden could be seen as the ideal kin-state, not getting involved or taking side in any political disputes, but always supportive in cultural matters, education, media and wherever the language is important.

The cross-border cooperation and contact would maybe have to be strictly regulated in some places (like in conflict areas), directed (like in the Nordic cooperation) but in other places just spontaneous.

Linguistic rights:

The two official languages in Finland are Finnish and Swedish. 90% of the population are Finnish-speaking and 5.4% are Swedish-speaking. Finland is divided into 320 municipalities, of which 30 are bilingual and the rest unilingual with either Finnish or Swedish as the primary language. Most of the bilingual municipalities are located on the west coast.

The basis for the linguistic rights is section 17 of the Constitution. The Language Act further elaborates on the linguistic rights of the two national languages and in addition, there are laws containing provisions on language matters in other legislation as well. Moreover, Finland is bound by several [international treaties](#).

People with some other mother tongue than Finnish or Swedish comprise 4.5% of the total population. The biggest language groups after Finnish and Swedish are Russian, Estonian, Somali, English and Arabian. According to the Constitution, the Sami, as an indigenous people, as well as the Roma and other groups, have the right to maintain and develop their own language and culture.

More information on the language climate in Finland can be found in Chapters 2 and 9 of the [Report of the Government on the application of language legislation 2013](#).