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## **Protection of national minorities: Council of Europe monitoring body publishes report on Finland**

Strasbourg, 13.04.2011 – The Council of Europe Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities today published its [Third Opinion on Finland](#), and the [government's Comments](#).

The Opinion highlights several legislative as well as institutional reform initiatives by the Finnish authorities in order to foster protection against discrimination.

The set-up of an "Equality Committee" to review the effectiveness of Finland's equality legislation and a proposal for a National Policy on Roma are amongst the most relevant initiatives. The Opinion also notes concerted efforts by the Finnish authorities to revitalise the Sami language and the fact that a Sami Cultural Centre is to be opened in 2012 in the Northern city of Inari.

The Advisory Committee expresses deep concern with the fact that negotiations surrounding the Sami people land rights appear blocked and underlines that the availability of minority language media is still insufficient. Furthermore, the implementation of the Language Act and the Sami Language Act is considered inadequate. Incidents of racism and xenophobia particularly on the Internet, continue to be reported.

Finally, the Advisory Committee notes that representation and influence of persons belonging to national minorities in the decision-making processes affecting them must be increased.

Among a number of other recommendations for action to be taken in various areas such as education, media, the use of language in public spaces and administrative reform, the Advisory Committee recommends in particular to:

- 1) take rapid measures to unblock the current stalemate and re-establish a constructive dialogue with the Sami Parliament to bring a solution to the legal uncertainty over land rights in the Sami Homeland;
- 2) take appropriate measures, in consultation with the Sami Parliament, to prevent the further disappearance of the Sami languages from public life through adequate funding and the effective implementation of the Sami revitalisation programme, and invest in relevant educational measures in order to ensure that the Sami have improved access to public services in the Sami languages;
- 3) take appropriate measures to ensure that the various consultation structures and mechanisms for persons belonging to national minorities are complemented and reorganised to provide clear communication channels and improve possibilities for representatives including those of numerically-smaller minorities, to have a real impact on the decision making process.

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*The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities provides for a monitoring system whereby the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, assisted by the Advisory Committee, composed of independent experts, evaluates the implementation of the convention.*

For more information, <http://www.coe.int/minorities>

