



The foundation for Norwegian Sámi policy

THE SÁMIS are the indigenous people in Norway. According to international law, the Sámi people are entitled to special protection, including of their cultural values and rights.

The Norwegian legislation that forms the legal foundation for the Sámi policy is first and foremost made up of the following:

- Article 110a of the Constitution
- Act of 12 June 1987 No. 56 concerning the Sámi Parliament (the Sámediggi) and other legal matters pertaining to the Sámis (the Sámi Act).

Article 110a of the Constitution states: “It is the responsibility of the authorities of the State to create conditions enabling the Sámi people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life.” The constitutional amendment implies a legal, political and moral obligation for Norwegian authorities to create an environment conducive to the Sámis themselves influencing on the development of the Sámi community. Article 110a of the Constitution is a constitutional guarantee for the Sámis as an indigenous people, as a legal and political guarantee for the protection of the Sámi language, culture and society. Even though the constitutional provision does not expressly use the term “indigenous people”, it is assumed that the State’s obligation as expressed in the Constitution is based on the fact that the Sámis are the indigenous people in Norway. Much of the positive development of the Sámi policy in Norway in the wake of the establishment of the Sámediggi can be directly related to the political and legal framework established by the amendment of the Constitution.

Chapter 1–2 of the Sámi Act states: “...the Sámis shall have their own national Sámi Parliament elected by and amongst the Sámis”. Chapter 2 of the Sámi Act also contains decisions concerning the Sámediggi’s authority and area of activity, election rules, etc. Pursuant to Chapter 2–1 of the Sámi Act, the Sámis shall themselves determine the Sámediggi’s area of activity.

Section 1-5 of the Sámi Act establishes that the Sámi and Norwegian languages have equal standing in Norway. They are equal pursuant to detailed provisions in Chapter 3 of the Sámi Act concerning use of the Sámi language.

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