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## History and prospects of the Saami issue

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## History and prospects of the Saami issue

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**Abstract.** The historical development of the Saami people in the XXI century differs a lot from the XX century and even more so from the XIX century. And over time, these changes are becoming more and more apparent. At the end of the 20th century the Saami, divided by the state borders of as many as 4 states and not having their own statehood, could only be compared with the Kurds or Balochs. That is the reason they are called “Kurds of Northern Europe”.

### 1. Introduction

Indigenous peoples, as a social phenomenon and a scientific problem, have been in the center of attention of the scientific community for a long time: the gradual disappearance of the unique culture of these ethnic groups, the loss of language, traditional culture and forms of everyday life are challenges that the countries of Northern Europe face. Among indigenous peoples of Northern Europe, the Saami can be defined as one of the most unique and original inhabitants of Europe. And this article considers the Saami administrative-legal status and the development of their national identity in the context of the modern political development of the countries of Northern Europe.

### 2. Main body

Historically, the Saami have always been living on the territories of Norway, Finland, Sweden and in the north-west of Russia (on the Kola Peninsula (see Fig. 1)). At the same time, at the national level, the Saami were considered to be a minority within the boundaries of the corresponding state formation (they were not treated as a single people) [1]. Meanwhile, being anthropologically quite heterogeneous, the Saami have shown examples of ethnic mobilization and the formation of a common Saami identity in recent decades.

шаблон: In international and Russian legal practice, unfortunately, there is no single definition of ethnic minorities, which today have preserved the traditional way of life, culture and customs. According to the ILO Convention “On Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries” No. 169 of 1989, “peoples leading a tribal lifestyle in independent countries whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions, or by special laws or legislation can be referred to as indigenous peoples” [2].



The peculiarity of the situation of the Saami is that they are considered both indigenous peoples and an ethnic minority at the same time. According to the legislation of Norway, Finland and Sweden they are given this social and legal status. Article 21 of the Charter of Murmansk Region assigns the status of “indigenous small-numbered peoples” to the Saami [3].

It should be emphasized that at present the Saami are a minority not only in relation to the population of national states, but also in relation to the population of the territory of their original residence. Only in the inner regions of Finnmark (Norway) and in Utsjoki (Finland) do the Saami remain an ethnic majority, while in Russia and Sweden, the Saami are a minority in all places of historical residence [4].

According to ethnographers, the Saami are most likely descended from groups of tribes related to Finno-Ugric peoples who settled in Fennoscandia in the Early Neolithic era (after the retreat of the ice sheet)[5]. It is noteworthy that the Saami were known to ancient historians who mentioned them in their writings [6]. From southern Finland and Karelia, the Saami migrated further north, retreating before the rapidly expanding Finnish and Karelian colonization of these lands; during the first millennium AD they gradually reached the coast of the Arctic Ocean, i.e. the territories of their current residence [7].

Like many other nations that have maintained a traditional way of life for a long time, the Saami faced economic and cultural expansion from more developed neighbours. The development of the northern regions of Scandinavia, Finland and Russia inevitably changed their familiar environment; the primitive way of life of the indigenous population was perceived by the newcomers from the South as the evidence of the savagery and backwardness of the Saami. It explained the necessity to “civilize” them. For example, the exhibitions of a collector and entrepreneur Karl Hagenbeck got particularly famous in Germany in the second half of the XIX-early XX centuries. He offered the audience not only exotic animals, but also Lapland Saami, who were presented as a kind of European analogue of North American Indians [8].

Founded in 1922 in Sweden, the world's first State Institute of Racial Biology was headed by H. Lundborg, a scientist and teacher who devoted his life to the ideas of racial biology and the desire to put them into practice [9]. Throughout the 1920s H. Lundborg and his colleagues used the data of Anthropology, Ethnography and Sociology to conduct their research. Today, up to 12 thousand photographs taken during expeditions to Sweden are stored in the funds of the Uppsala University research library.

The analysis of photographs made at the institute was not analytical, but only quantitative and descriptive, in the spirit of traditional physical anthropology of the 19th century. The processing of the photographs helped to divide Sweden into different racial regions, based on the height of the people studied, the size of their skull, color of hair and eyes. People were sorted into three racial types: North European, East Baltic and Lapland.

As Ulrika Schelman, an Uppsala University researcher, notes, “North European individuals generally look healthy and strong, while other races are represented by people who do not look so good. The North European type of appearance was pictured in a more elegant way, in contrast to, for example, the Saami, who were portrayed carelessly” [10]. It must be clarified that H. Lundborg considered the Saami as a vivid example of a degenerative nation and clearly sought to expose them in the most negative light.

It should be noted that in 1919-1937, in Sweden the Saami were subjected to forced relocation, and in 1913 - 1971 the Swedish government carried out a segregation policy towards Saami children, some of whom were taught in separate schools [11]. Similar phenomena, connected with restrictions and assimilation processes, can be found in the policy towards the Saami in other countries of Northern Europe. A strong blow to the traditional life of the Russian Saami took place in the 1920 - 30s, when active industrial development of the Kola Peninsula began, supplemented by forced collectivization. As a result, the Saami nearly stopped practicing their usual trades, and their traditional culture, economy and way of life were in danger of destruction [12].

In the 1950s in Norway, Finland and Sweden, the growth of the Saami national identity began: in 1956, the Saami Union appeared, uniting the Saami community organizations of these three countries. In 1973 - 1993 Saami parliaments were created in the Nordic countries (Finland - in 1973, Norway - in 1987, Sweden - in 1993) [13]. The opening of Saami representative bodies marked an important step in

the official recognition of their role in social life and demonstrated a change in the ethno-political relations of the Saami and nation states. Gradually, international conferences devoted to the problems of the situation of the Saami in Northern Europe were organized, and more and more research papers studying the Saami past and present can be found.

Sweden, Norway and Finland have adopted a series of legislative acts specifically dedicated to or directly affecting the Saami. The relevant sections of the legislation relating to the Saami regulate the following issues: the legal status of bodies involved in the Saami affairs and the Saami participation in their formation and activities; financing Saami communities and the development of Saami culture; use of the Saami language and intellectual property; traditional Saami activities: reindeer husbandry, land use, forest management, etc.[14]

Since 1984, the public interests of Russian Saami have been represented by the Kola Saami Association; since 1992, the Saami of the Russian Federation have joined the Saami Union. In the 1990s orientation to international contacts and the transfer of the bulk of communication from the position of “ethnic group - the state” to the position of “ethnic group - ethno political formation that goes beyond the borders of Russia” along with awareness of the value of the Saami language have become the most important factors of ethnic mobilization for Russian Saami [15].

In these years, receiving constant powerful impulses from outside, the Saami ethno-political movement in Russia gradually shapes and manifests the concept of common Saami identity. Thus, the following results can be highlighted: on December 11-12, 2010 the Second Congress of the Saami of Murmansk Region approved the temporary representative body of the Saami people - the Saami Parliament, which doesn't have legislative initiative. On November 22, 2014, in the village of Lovozero of Murmansk, the III Congress of Russian Saami was held, in which 65 delegates from Saami organizations, public associations and communities took part. At the congress, it was decided to create a “Union of Russian Saami”. Its aim was to unite all Saami organizations in Russia. Its functions are to represent the interests of the Saami concerning the following: legislation issues and the distribution of subsidies transferred by regional and federal governments for the implementation of economic and cultural projects. An organization that, on behalf of the Government of Murmansk Region, coordinates the activities of the Saami Assembly, as well as the organization of Saami festivals and holidays is the “Center for Indigenous Peoples of the North”[16].

Speaking about the Saami Union, it should be noted that its goal as a cultural and political organization is to protect the interests of the Saami as a single people. Since the 1970s the organization has begun its active work on indigenous peoples' issues at the global level. In 1975 the Saami Union became a member of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), which represents peoples who natively live on their territories but do not have the right to make decisions about their territories or rights.

In the late 1980s the Saami Union received the status of a non-governmental organization in the United Nations, where it participated in the development of the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples[17]. Three indigenous associations - the Saami Union, the Inuit Association and the Association of the Small-numbered Peoples of the Russian North - have permanent membership status in the Arctic Council, established in 1996 in Ottawa[18].

### **3. Conclusion**

It goes without saying, the international activities of the Saami Union had a significant impact on the adoption of laws in their favor in all countries where the Saami live. Over the decades since the appearance of the first forms of self-organization and representation of the Saami people, the Union has managed to achieve considerable success, having strengthened its status both in a number of European states and on the international arena. Considerable efforts are being made to preserve and maintain the traditional Saami culture, lifestyle, and the

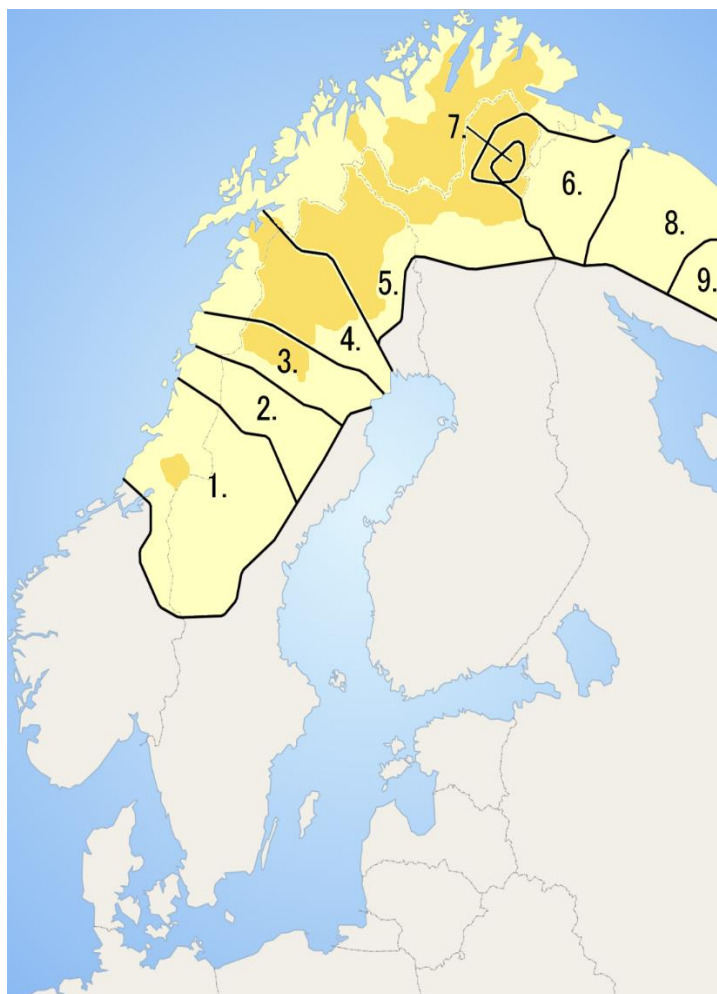
development of their languages. It is of high importance as the Arabic language becomes de facto, the 3rd most common language in the countries of Northern Europe [19].

On November 16, 2005, in Helsinki, the annual joint ministerial meeting, which was attended by the chairmen of the three Saami Parliaments from the respective countries, was held. A group of experts led by former Chairperson of the Norwegian Supreme Court, Professor Karsten Smith, presented a proposal for a “Scandinavian Convention of the Saami” residing in Finland, Norway and Sweden [20,21]. This convention recognizes the Saami as one of the indigenous peoples living within national borders in all three countries. It proposes a unified set of minimum standards for accounting for the rights to develop the Saami language and culture, rights for land and water, as well as their rights to form their own national community [22]. Despite the fact that this convention has not been ratified yet, successful examples of the wide autonomy of the Greenlandians, Alanders, Faroese, with subsequent independence, within the borders of their residence in the European Union, cannot but motivate the Saami to such actions. And they are bound to succeed taking the above mentioned examples into account. At the end of the 20th century the Saami, divided by the state borders of as many as 4 states and not having their own statehood, could only be compared with the Kurds or Balochs. That is the reason they are called “Kurds of Northern Europe”. And, perhaps, the only thing that distinguishes them from the Kurds or the above-mentioned Balochs is a non-violent path to gaining their own statehood and a positive agenda.

However, it is not easy to discuss the prospects for the development of the cross-border movement of the Saami. On the one hand, the results already achieved allow the majority of Saami communities to feel comfortable in the states they reside in (which cannot be said about the Saami neighbors in the region - the Scots, or European neighbors - the Basques, Irish, Catalans, Flemish, Walloons, Transvaals, and many others.). On the other hand, the ongoing climatic changes and emerging prospects for the development of various minerals in the Saami regions of residence lead to political, territorial and structural changes in their lives (which can be illustrated by the history of the development of the indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East in the USSR). The influence of states interested in their presence in the Arctic should also be taken into account [23].



**Figure 1.** The distribution area of the Saami and their compact residence in the 21st century



**Figure 2.** The distribution area of the Saami languages and their dialects in the 21st century

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