



COUNCIL OF EUROPE    CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 29 September 2005

MIN-LANG/PR (2005) 3  
Addendum 1

**EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES**

**Addition to the Third Periodical Report  
presented to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe  
in accordance with Article 15 of the Charter**

**NORWAY**



DET KONGELIGE  
KULTUR- OG KIRKEDEPARTEMENT

*Royal Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs*

Council of Europe  
FR-67075 Strasbourg

Your ref.

Our ref.  
2001/2911 KU/KU2  
CKN:amb

Date  
29.09.2005

**European Charter for regional or minority languages – addition to the third periodical report from Norway**

In November 2001, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation requesting the Norwegian government to clarify the status of Kven, as to whether it is a dialect of the Finnish language or a separate language. In Norway's third report on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages – passed on to the Council of Europe on March 2005 – the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs informed that the Government would be debating these issues in April 2005. The Government's resolution in this matter should then be passed on to the Committee with a statement outlining the official views and conclusions concerning the status of the Kven language.

Please find enclosed an unofficial translation of the resolution that the Government has adopted in this matter.

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# RECOGNITION OF KVEN AS A SEPARATE LANGUAGE

## I. Background

The Kvens belong to an ethnic group that originated in Northern Norway. Since 1998, this population group has been recognized as a national minority in Norway, in accordance with the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (the Framework Convention). Norway has ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (the Minority Language Charter) with regard to the Kven/Finnish minority language. Government authorities chose to use the double designation on the grounds that, inter alia, the Kvens themselves refer to their language as both Kven and Finnish. The estimated number of speakers varies from 2000 to 8000 persons, depending on the criteria and methods used when counting. In November 2001, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation requesting the Norwegian government to clarify the status of Kven, as to whether it is a dialect of the Finnish language or a separate language. In response to this request, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and the Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs commissioned a comprehensive study on the subject, carried out by Kenneth Hyltenstam, Professor at the University of Stockholm. His study was circulated to the ministries and appropriate bodies and institutions for comments. Forty-one answers were received. Most of the opinions argued in favour of recognizing Kven as a separate language.

## II The Report

The report concludes, inter alia, that the social and linguistic circumstances specific to the Kven minority justify the identification of Kven as a separate language, rather than a dialect of the Finnish language. Structural linguistic differences between Kven and Finnish weigh in favour of considering Kven as a language in its own right. Another decisive criterion is, according to the report, that the Kvens themselves see Kven as a separate language. Furthermore, the report concludes that the distinction between Kven and Meankieli, which has been recognized as a separate language in Sweden, is in every aspect smaller than the distinction between Kven and standard Finnish language. However, over the years Kven has developed in a social and cultural context different to Meankieli. Consequently, the two linguistic variants cannot be combined into one language. The report emphasizes, however, that there is no clear scientific evidence to substantiate the definition of this linguistic variant neither as a separate language nor as a Finnish dialect. The report, as well as a number of consulted bodies, pointed out that the core of this decision is a political matter and therefore to be dealt with as such by Government authorities.

### **III. Regarding the Charter for Minority Languages**

The Charter for Minority Languages allows Contracting States (including Norway) to choose between a lower and a higher level of protection under part II or III of the Charter, respectively, with regard to their regional and minority languages. In Norway, North Sami has been granted protection under part III, while the Kven/Finnish language is protected under part II, along with Romany, Romanese and the other Sami languages.

Protection under part II entails commitments, but no legally binding obligations. Protection under part III implies that Government authorities undertake to implement a minimum of 35 articles or paragraphs chosen among the provisions of Part III of the Charter and to set out concrete linguistic measures to this end. A number of the consulted bodies hold the view that the determination of level of protection under the Charter for Minority Languages is a far more crucial issue than the typological classification of the language. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to set up a linguistic infrastructure for Kven, including standardization, development of a normative grammar, dictionaries, textbooks and teaching material, before it can be relevant to consider ratification under Part III of the Convention. At the time of ratification of the Charter for Minority Languages, merely North Sami was in a position to be granted protection under Part III, this being the only minority language for which an adequate number of measures were already in place, making ratification under Part III relevant. Ratification of the Convention under part III for Kven will be unfortunate without the ability to comply with the ensuing obligations. Likewise, it will be difficult to advocate protection of Kven under part III of the Charter unless this option is also considered for the other minority languages, which at present are included in Part II of the Convention.

### **IV. Regarding education**

Article 14, paragraph 2, of the Framework Convention states that in areas inhabited – traditionally or in substantial numbers – by persons belonging to national minorities, if there is sufficient demand, the Parties shall endeavour to ensure, as far as possible and within the framework of their education systems, that persons belonging to those minorities have adequate opportunities for being taught the minority language or for receiving instruction in this language. Pursuant to Article 2, paragraph 7 of the Act of 17 July 1998 No. 61 relating to Primary and Secondary Education (The Education Act), students of Kven/Finnish ethnicity have a right to receive tuition in Finnish as second language on certain conditions. This right applies to primary school pupils belonging to the Kven/Finnish community, who are domiciled in the counties of Troms and Finnmark. Provided there is, within the municipality, a minimum of three pupils of Kven/Finnish ethnicity requiring tuition in their language, the municipal authorities have a legal obligation to offer such tuition. According to the Ministry of Education and Research, tuition in Kven will fall within the subject Finnish as second language, as outlined in the national curriculum of 1997. The Ministry of Education and Research holds the view that both the structural linguistic differences and the cultural and social circumstances specific to Finnish and Kven can receive adequate attention in current education practice. New curricula are to be prepared for all subjects in primary and secondary education as part of the “Knowledge Promotion Effort” - a comprehensive reform of compulsory education, which will come into force shortly. The Ministry of Education and Research will call upon the Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education, in their capacity as executive Government Agency in this matter, to ensure that Kven is adequately mentioned in the new curriculum for Finnish as second language.

### **III. Conclusions**

Recognition of Kven as a separate language has a strong symbolic value for the Kven minority. In addition, considering the intentions of Article 15 of the Framework Convention, the opinion held by the minority group affected by this decision shall carry decisive weight. Most of the observations tended to be strongly in favour of recognizing Kven as a separate language. On these grounds, the Government intends to recognize Kven as a separate language in Norway with continuation of the existing protection under Part II of the Charter for Minority Languages. Based on the Government's policy towards national minorities and relevant international conventions in this area, the Government shall continue to grant Kven protection under Part II of the Charter. The Government undertakes to consider financial instruments eligible for promoting the development of Kven language, as part of the preparation of the annual State budget.

The Ministry of Culture and Church Affairs  
proposes:

Kven is to be recognized as a separate language and to be protected under Part II of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.