The protection of the languages in Finland in the 21st century

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According to the Language Act (423/2003, section 37), the Government of Finland must submit a report on the application of language legislation in Finland to the Parliament once every electoral term, at four-year intervals. In addition to the national languages, Finnish and Swedish, the situation with Saami languages, Romani and sign languages are examined. Furthermore, the reports include varying information on Russian, Estonian, Yiddish, Tatar, Karelian, and Somali.

Until this year, the Finnish Government has submitted three reports, the first report in 2006, the second follow-up report in 2009, and the third one in 2013. The reports include detailed information on the implementation and enforcement of language legislation within all government sectors including the public administration, social and health care services, education, law enforcement and judicial system. The main sources of information are various government organisations, non-governmental organisations and citizens.

In order to give a general picture of the language situation in Finland and the possible changes in the Finnish society, the paper examines reports from four different perspectives: the application of language legislation in state and municipal administration, in social welfare and health care, in the police and judicial system, and in education. The main aim is to investigate, how the parallel use of national languages has developed in the Finnish society during the past 10 years, and to show, how Finland promotes different language groups and first languages used in the country. Hence, the aim is to analyse, how the linguistic rights become true in practice.


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