

## THE ETHNIC MOVEMENTS OF THE FINNO-UGRIAN PEOPLE IN RUSSIA – THEIR REFLECTIONS ON THE ETHNO-NATIONAL SITUATION IN FINLAND

Finland was until recently described as an ethno-nationally homogeneous and monocultural country. From the early 1980s through the late 1990s the number of foreigners increased from 12.000 to 85.000; this represents about 1.5 % of the Finnish population. Although the number is very low when seen from the international perspective, the rapid change has greatly disconcerted Finnish society.

The collapse of the former Soviet Union and the end of the cold war has opened state borders, which in the past were strictly closed. One consequence is increasing emigration from the former Soviet Union. The biggest group of contemporary immigrants in Finland consists of Russian-speakers. In Finland there were in 2000 according to the statistics about 32 000 citizens of the former Soviet Union. They can be divided into several subcategories. The largest group composed of Russian Finns, their spouses, and a smaller amount of migrant workers, who for the most part emigrate from the Republic of Karelia (in Russia) to eastern Finland as opposed to those in southern Finland coming from Estonia and the Leningrad region. In respect to immigration eastern Finland differs from the rest of Finland. In number, immigrants (migrant workers, students, remigrants, spouses of Finns, asylum-seekers and refugees) are few in eastern Finland. Distances are great in the region; ethnic communities are weak and the necessary ethnic networks are difficult to create.

### ETHNO-NATIONAL GROUPING IN THE KARELIAN REPUBLIC

The opening of Russia has provided an opportunity to focus research towards questions of nationality during the early Soviet period in particular as well as the contemporary ethno-national movements.

The nationality composition in the Karelian Republic in 1997 was as follows: Russians 572 000 (in 1989 – 581 571), 73.6%; Karelians 90 000, (in 1989 – 78 928), 10.0 %; Belorussians 52 000, (in 1989 – 55 530) 7.0%; Ukrainians 24 000, (in 1989 – 28 242), 3.6 %; Finns 22 000, (in 1989 – 18 420), 3 %; Vepsians 6000, (in 1989 – 5 954), 0.8%; and smaller numbers of Poles, Tatars, Chuvash, Lithuanians, Jews and Mordvinians. (Klement'ev 1991, 59 – 60, Respublika ... 1999, 57 ). Even though the Karelians – the titular nation – were the second largest national group, they formed only one-tenth of the population.

The Karelians, Vepsians and Finns belong to same linguistic group: the Baltic-Finnish branch of the Finno-Ugrian peoples. The Karelians and Vepsians can be defined as indigenous peoples. In 1993 has been accepted the law on the status of indigenous people in Russia. In 1999 the Vepsians succeeded in gaining this status. The status of an indigenous people is important to these groups, according to international law and its modifications. In present-day Russia the status provides some guarantees – at least in theory – about developing the national language and culture of the group. In this international legal sense language is one of the main criteria for defining a group.

The Karelians and the Finns have a special, politically and ethno-historically, highly complicated place on the ethno-national map of Russian Karelia. The position of the Karelians as the titular people has been greatly affected by the fact that the “national language” of the republic has been Finnish. This exceptional relationship between the Karelians and the Finns in Russia, and to some extent also the bonds between the Karelians and the Finns and the so-called Finnish-Karelians (in Finland) have deeply influenced contemporary the ethno-national atmosphere in Russia. The status of the Karelians as a titular nation and the partly common history of the Finns and the Karelians makes it necessary to pay special attention to the position of the Finno-Ugric peoples in the Karelian Republic.

#### The Finns

The Finnish population in the Karelian Republic totalled 22 000 in 1997. The Finns in Karelia are not a homogeneous group, but consist of very different types of people. The largest group consists of Finns who moved from Finland in the 17th century to an area near the present-day Leningrad district (the so-called Ingria/Inkerinmaa

in Finnish). They are called “Ingrians” or “Ingrian Finns” (“Inkeriläiset” in Finnish). Until the revolution they had their own Finnish culture, and Finnish literary and cultural institutions, which were often organized around the Finnish Lutheran parish (Nevalainen 1996, 57 – 59; Fishman et al. 1996, 71 – 80). Many of the Ingrians were deported from their homes to Siberia, first as result of “dekulakization” and later on the eve of the Second World War and in 1941 and 1942. Those who lived in the area occupied by the Germans were removed to Finland in 1943. After the war these Ingrian Finns were returned to the Soviet Union, and were deported. Since the late 1940s the Ingrians Finns have been allowed to move to the Karelian Republic. In 1949 21 000 moved to Karelia. (Lallukka 1998, 55 – 58).

Ingrian Finns speak the Eastern dialect of the Finnish language as their mother tongue. Many of them have been linguistically assimilated into the Russian population. One of the strongest factors differentiating them ethno-nationally from the Russian and Karelian population is religion. Ingrian Finns are Lutherans, which has been and remains significant in the contemporary situation forming their national identity. (Virtanen 1996, 139 – 140).

A second group of Finns are the descendants of the “Red” emigrants who escaped from Finland after the abortive revolution of 1918. A few thousand of these refugees settled in Karelia, and they played a prominent role in the creation of the Republic in the 1920s and early 1930s. (Kangaspuro 1998, 123 – 160). More Finns, maybe from 10 000 to 15 000 people, moved to the Soviet Union crossing illegally the border during the years of the great depression. (Kostiainen 1988, 57 – 65, 219). Finally, a group of Finns from Canada and the United States moved to the Soviet Karelia in the 1930s by invitation of the Soviet government. The ideological and political orientation of the American ( and Canadian) Finns was pro-Soviet, but the circumstances in Karelia often proved to be a disappointment to them, and nearly half of the 6000 immigrants returned there. (Sevander 2000, 77).

### The Karelians

The total number of Karelians in the Soviet Union in 1989 was about 100 000 (138 000 in 1979). Most of them lived in the Karelian Republic (78 900) but there is also a Karelian settlement in the Kalinin district, the so-called Tver Karelia (23 200). In the Karelian Republic most of the Karelians live in the regions of Olonec and Priazha in the south (where they call themselves as “Lyydiläine”, “Lyydikoi” or “Livgiläine” Livviköi’) and in the region of Kalevala in the north (where they call themselves “Karjala”). By religion the Karelians are Russian Orthodox. (Taroeva 1965, 5 – 6, Klement’ev 1991, 59 – 60).

The Karelian language is one of the Baltic-Finnish languages and is divided into three main dialects: North Karelian, spoken in the northern area (closely related to Finnish), and the Livonian and Lydian dialects spoken in the south. The dialects are still quite distant from each other, which has made it and still makes it difficult to develop one unified written language.

The creation of a Karelian literary language has to be examined in connection to Finnish and its status in the Soviet Union. Since 1923 the Finnish language has for most part had the status of a “national language”, and in the northern parts of Soviet Karelia Finnish has been used as the language of instruction in the so-called national schools. The situation in the southern parts of Karelia has been different because of the great linguistic distance to Finnish. There Russian has been the language of instruction in the schools, and in this sense the position of the titular people has been quite weak. (Anttikoski 1998, 207 – 208).

It was not until the late 1930s that a Karelian literary language was created, and in 1937 Karelian was given the status of the third official language in Soviet Karelia. During the years of Stalinist terror the Karelian language started to displace Finnish in the press and as the language of instruction, etc. (Anttikoski 1998, 214 – 215). Both linguistically and practically the creation of the new Karelian language soon turned out to be extremely complicated due to the difficulties of combining the three different dialects. A new shift in the Stalinist politics put an end to these attempts after only a three-year experimental period (see Austin 1992, 16 – 35).

It is also worth noting that in the Kalinin district there were plans to employ Finnish as the language of instruction in the 1920s. Later, in the 1930s attempts were made to develop Karelian into a literary language, after it had become clear that Finnish in practice could not offer an alternative to Russian (Anttikoski 1998, 208 – 209).

It would be offer a distorted picture to examine the Karelians in Russia without mentioning the Karelians on the other side of the border, the Finnish Karelians. Today they are for most part linguistically and culturally assimilated into the Finnish culture and way of life, even if many of them still consider themselves Karelian. Religion is an important factor here: most Finnish Karelians are Greek-Orthodox.

During the inter-war period the bulk of Finnish Karelians lived in the area which was ceded after the Second World War to the Soviet Union. The population left the area and was resettled in Finland. Since the war the Karelians have established associations, cultural clubs and semiformal organizations in Finland which have now started active cooperation with their Russian Karelian partners. To some degree they have been involved in the ethno-national movement in Russian Karelia, giving it emotional, cultural and financial support.

## The Vepsians

The Vepsians in Russia live in three different administrative units in the Republic of Karelia, in the Leningrad district and in the Vologda Region. According to the latest census figures they number 12 000, 6000 of whom live in the Karelian Republic.

It has to be underlined that compared with the Karelians the Vepsians were much less effected by the formation of the Finnish nation. As a result the relationship between the Vepsians and the Finns has not been as complicated as that of the Karelians. Even though the Vepsians are not a titular people, the history of the Vepsian literary language has been less complicated than that of the Karelian. In the early 1930s a literary language was created and the teaching of Vepsian started in the schools in 1932. This only occurred in the schools of the Leningrad district but not in Soviet Karelia. Literature was also published in Vepsian but again the centre of these ethno-cultural activities was not in Soviet Karelia. In Karelia the question of the Vepsian language gained little attention, and the events of the year 1937 put an end to the development of Vepsian culture in the Leningrad district as well (Pimenov et al. 1989, 21; Zaitseva 1989, 97 – 100).

The history of Karelian and Vepsian literary language is of prime importance to understanding contemporary ethno-national movements. In spite of the difficulties, earlier attempts to create a literary language provided a basis for further linguistic and socio-cultural development. However, in the conditions of the new ethno-national activism it has been both easy to criticize and underestimate the short history of the Karelian literary language. National activists see its pioneer value, but underline its bureaucratic character. It has been seen as a linguistic “revolution” from above and in this sense contrary to contemporary tendencies (see Zaitseva 1994, 14).

The position of the Karelian and Vepsian languages close to the more developed Finnish language has raised problems which are both linguistic and political, and many of them are still present in contemporary post-communist Russia.

## The Russians

For at least 1000 years the area which is today called Karelia has been inhabited by groups speaking both Baltic-Finnish languages and some East-Slavic groups. Old Scandinavian sagas (Egil-saga, in 874), the Chronicles of Novgorod (in 1143) and old Russian chronicles (1100 – 1300) mentioned this ethno-national combination (Čistov 1976, 20 – 21, Saksa 1996, 33). Because of this ethno-national history we can speak about “old” and “new” Russians in the Karelian Republic. The “Old” Russians have traditionally inhabited the eastern parts of Russian Karelia. Before the revolution they comprised about half the whole population of the area which later became Soviet Karelia (Lallukka 1998, 46 – 47). Since the revolution census figures indicate that their number has consistently grown: in 1926 146 400 (56,2% of the total population), in 1939 296 500 (63.2%); in 1959 412 800 (63.4%); in 1970 486 163 (68.1%); and in 1989 581 571 (73.6%) (Lallukka, 1998, 46, 51, Klement’ev 1991, 59). The increase is partly connected with industrialization. In 1933 as much as 42% of the Russian population lived in towns (like the Finns), whereas the Karelians and the Vepsians were peasants (Lallukka 1998, 52).

After the Second World War Belorussians and Ukrainians moved voluntarily or were forced to move to Russian Karelia. They numbered 71900 (11.0%) in 1959 and 23 600 (3.6 %) in 1989 (Lallukka 1998, 59). A major segment of the Russian and Belorussian people have been working in new forest settlements in the northern parts of Karelia. The ideology, culture and everyday life in urban industrial areas tend to reduce ethno-national cultural differences among these newcomers.

## THE HISTORICAL LEGACY

For centuries Karelia was a battleground between the multinational Russian and Swedish empires. Coping with the changing conquerors did not leave much room for national consolidation or even for establishing a Karelian literary language. (Laine 1994, 13 – 25). During the 19th century, when Finland was an autonomous Grand Duchy within the Russian Empire, a Finnish national movement rose and enjoyed considerable popular support in eastern Finland, but the influence of the Finnish national awakeners poorly reached the Greek-Orthodox Karelian population. And if it did, it did not raise (or provoke) significant national or ethno-national organization among the Karelians. (Heikkinen 1983, 75 – 90; 1989, 183 – 197, 337 – 344; Liikanen 1995, 264 – 267.).

During the early Soviet period the border with the new independent Finland was more or less closed. Still, the building of socialism in the so-called Karelian Workers’ Commune (est. 1920) and the Karelian Autonomous Socialist Republic (est. 1923) had a clear national colour. However, it was neither the titular people, the Karelians, nor the since 1923 largest population group, the Russians (Mastjugina et al. 1997, 299 – 300), but the Finnish Reds, who had emigrated from Finland after the abortive revolution of 1918, who played first fiddle in politics. In Karelia the bolshevik nationality policy, which during the 1920s was often advantageous to the indigenous peoples, actually

favoured the immigrant Finns more than the native Karelians. In relative terms the Finns had more education and more experience in organizational and administrative work than the Karelians and the Russians living in the area, and in the prevailing primitive conditions they smoothly achieved hegemony in the administrative apparatus, the press, cultural life and the educational system. Alongside Russian, Finnish was used as the “national language”, which presumably created difficulties among the native Karelians (especially in the southern parts of the republic). On the other hand, the longer literary tradition of the Finnish language undoubtedly also strengthened the ethno-national and cultural distinctiveness of the republic. (Kangaspuro 1998, 153 – 156).

To what degree was the hegemony of the Red Finns (themselves of course constantly claiming to be observing internationalist principles) able to function as the basis for organic assimilation and a nationally-coloured social solidarity between the Finnish elite and the native Karelian population? This question remains unresolved. The waves of the Great Terror overwhelmed the Finnish Red elite (and many of their Karelian and Russian collaborators), now classified as “contra-revolutionaries” and “nationalists” (Rentola 1994, 31 – 33, 44 – 50, 60 – 64). The Stalinist terror made Russian once and for all the main language of the party apparatus and the administration. In 1937 the elimination of the Finnish elite was complemented by the Finnish language being stripped of its status, and by promoting the creation of a Karelian literary language to be adopted as the new second official national language. (Kangaspuro 1998, 142 – 153; Anttikoski 1998, 214 – 215).

In the circumstances of the Great Terror the sudden invention of the Karelian language and traditions could hardly be based on a broader national awakening of the Karelian population. The political decisions were made at the highest levels of the Soviet hierarchy, and from the linguistic point of view the commands from above produced a highly artificial literary language, an unsuccessful mixture of the different Karelian dialects. (Barancev 1967, 97 – 98; Afanas’eva 1988, 27 – 28). The heyday of the Karelian language ended only three years later after a short period of vague literary and educational experiments under the conditions of terror and war (Austin 1992, 16 – 35).

In 1940 after the so-called Winter War against Finland, a new Karelian-Finnish Soviet Socialist Republic was established, and Finnish was again adopted as an official national language alongside with Russian. It did not, however, achieve the same position in administration and education as before. Finnish was still taught in schools but it was no longer the language of the education. Till the formation of the Karelian Autonomous Socialist Republic in 1958 it was in principle an obligatory subject for Karelian and Finnish pupils, but lost this status in 1960 when it became a voluntary subject. (Barancev 1967, 98).

During the decades following the war the status of the Finnish language varied. Some of the Finnish cultural institutions continued their previous working and some new were created: the most important were the Finnish theatre, the Finnish language publishing house, periodical journals and newspapers, radio channels and certain academic institutions. (Očerki. 1964, 472 – 477). However, it was only the Finnish, the Finnish Ingrian population and the Karelians from the North, who in practice had access to this Finnish speaking cultural sphere. Only in the sphere of folklore Karelian language was more broadly used. (Pimenov and Taro’eva 1970, 237). In this situation, where no basic education in Finnish (not to speak about Karelian) existed this sort of “nursing” of Finnish literature and culture could hardly hide the fact that the younger generations of Finns, Karelians and Vepsians faced inevitable assimilation into the Russian speaking majority. By the 1980s fast and firm assimilation and massive settlement of new Russian speaking immigrants had made the Finno-Ugric population a small minority. (Laine 1996, 77 – 92).

## CONTEMPORARY ETHNO-NATIONAL MOVEMENTS IN RUSSIAN KARELIA

Ethno-national associations belong to the first wave of voluntary associations in the Karelian Republic. The first to be activated were the Finno-Ugric groups, in the late 1980s. Among them the situation of the Ingrian Finns was more favourable than that of the other ethno-national groups. Through the Finnish language press and media they managed to raise the question of the additional cultural and social rights for Ingrian Finns. A special issue of the journal “Punalippu” involving this question was published in 1987. For the first time the justification of the historical deportations was questioned. According to Viktor Birin, the reactions of the government and the non-Finnish population were indignant: the situation was even seen as being analogous to that of Nagorno-Karabach. (Birin 1996, 30).

During the Soviet period the demand for the rehabilitation of the deported Ingrian Finns was regarded as political and more far-reaching than was allowed to an ethno-national cultural association. This made the formal organization of Ingrian Finns complicated. In 1989 the government permitted the establishment of the Ingrian National Revival Movement (later the League of Ingrian Finns). The Tallinna Union and the Leningrad Union of the Ingrian Finns were founded in 1988 and 1989; they served as prototypes (Klement’ev 1996, 143 – 144; Birin 1996, 30 – 32). Undoubtedly, the Petrozavodsk Union of Ingrian Finns has had success in advocating the Ingrian rehabilitation and in promoting Finnish language and culture.

The birth of the Karelian and the Vepsian organizations proceeded in different ways. The question of language

was more difficult. From a linguistic point of view it was more a question of creating a new literary language than consolidating an old one. The beginning of the movements among these two groups was very similar. "Punalippu" published special issues concerning the Vepsians (1989) and the Karelians (1990). Then formal ethno-national organizations were founded: in 1989 the Society for Vepsian Culture and the Society for Karelian Culture (since 1990, the Union of Karelian People) were established. The presidents of the societies were scholars from the Karelian branch of the Academy. (Birin 1996, Heikkinen 1994, 287 – 288).

On the whole the Karelian associations and the Society for Vepsian Culture have worked mainly in the sphere of culture and language. It appears that some of the elementary goals concerning language have been achieved. Vepsian and Karelian (actually two) literary languages have been created, linguistic primers and other elementary books published, as were the first translations of the Bible into the national languages in the early 1990s. In 1992 the Petrozavodsk Centre for National Cultures (that is, Karelian, Vepsian and Finnish) was opened. New Karelian and Vepsian newspapers have been founded. The national languages have been approved as school subjects in a number of schools in the Karelian Republic and the Leningrad district. In 1993 the Faculty of Baltic-Finnish Languages and Cultures at the University of Petrozavodsk was established, and in 1994 new Departments of Karelian and Vepsian Languages and Cultures were created at the University of Petrozavodsk and the Pedagogical University of Petrozavodsk. National folklore festivals have been organized. Television and radio programmes and novels and poetry have been published in the newly developed national languages, though with very limited circulation. Vepsian and Karelian national administrative units have been formed in the Karelian Republic. Karelians, Vepsians and Ingrians now have their own flag (Birin 1996, 34; Heikkinen 1994, 287 – 288). But it remains to be seen if their significance will be mostly symbolic. To some degree the Petrozavodsk Union of Ingrian Finns succeeded in achieving Ingrian rehabilitation and in consolidating Finnish language and culture.

In the ethno-national cultural revival organizational and financial support from Finland has been important. Part of it has been channelled through the government budget and part has been organized by individuals and groups. To some extent this might also have influenced the role the movements played in the renewal of the political system.

It appears that the confrontational and to some extent contradictory attitude towards the state (especially in the Ingrian movement), evident in the late 1980s, has become less radical. The organizations have started to look increasingly to government support. This has been clear in the field of other organizations, too.

The new ethno-national cultural situation is most of all reflected in the question of the new language legislation. According to recent plans the Karelian language is to become the second official language of the Karelian Republic, replacing Finnish, and the Vepsian language will get some guarantee of further consolidation. During the preparatory process many organizations and institutions have been heard. Opinions have been split among the Karelians themselves. The northern Karelian population tends to support the Finnish language, which has always been close to their own manner of speaking. The Union of Ingrian Finns supported the Karelian language on the basis of the diminishing number of Ingrian Finns in Russia. In contrast, many people in Finland have been eagerly supported the old status of the Finnish language, considering it the only possible "national" language in Russian Karelia. In spite of the fact that the Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish cultural societies have not been against the bill, the language question remains unresolved.

## CHANGING FINNISHNESS IN RUSSIA

In 1990 the government of Finland declared the Finns in the former Soviet Union Finnish remigrants, which allowed them to move to Finland (Virtanen 1996, 138). The decision had been made specifically to cover the Ingrian Finns, but in practice it has involved all Finnish groups in Russia, except Karelians. The decision has got many consequences concerning future of the Finnish population in Russia and their organizations.

Since 1990 the Union of Ingrian Finns has been increasingly forced to handle quite different problems from cultural ones. The union started involving in emigration, as the bulk of the Ingrians have moved to Finland. (Birin 1996, 35, 38).

Finnish remigrants in Finland are meeting new problems and challenges. It is difficult for them to behave themselves like "proper" Finns according to the criteria used by the Finnish officials and the public opinion. Only few of them know the Finnish language, are Lutherans by their religion, and are possessed of something called the Finnish identity. Naturally those are members of the older generation. This observation seemed to be a kind of absurd shock to the media and the public opinion in Finland in the middle of 1990s.

In order to improve knowledge of the Finnish language, culture and society Finnish officials started to arrange in 1997 special training courses for Russian citizens, who were allowed to immigrate to Finland as remigrants. The results of a small-scaled research made by Olga Davydova at one training course in the end of 90s in Petrozavodsk gives interesting information of the ethno-national identity: only 46 % of the participants identified themselves as Finns; 40 % as Russians; 8% as some other nationalities (Karelians, Vepsians, Chuvash, Mordvinians or Belorussians).

80 % of the participants did not know the Finnish language at all; only 6 % of them spoke it fluently. (Davydova & Heikkinen 2001). It is easy to notice that nationality registered in a passport does not totally correlate with the language skills. This fact has been well-known by many ethnographical studies done as early as in the 1970s in the Soviet Union (on Karelians, see Klement'ev 1974, 1976).

The question of the ethnic or national identity was of some delicacy, and it was uncomfortable to be discussed among the participants. Ever now and then there was arguing on who has and who has not "proper Finnish blood" ("tčisto krovnye") and what is its significance. Only elderly people, who were grown up in Finnish speaking circles with Finnish habits, Finnish press and literature felt like returning to their roots, when attending at the courses. The ethno-national state of their children is more complicated. Even if they are "proper" Finnish by their origin they often feel themselves as alien or consider themselves as "soviet", not really Finnish or Russians. (Davydova & Heikkinen 2001).

In future we are going to study more in details the paradoxical process in which a Finnish Russian becomes a Russian Finn. It asks what being a Finn in the Soviet Union meant and what it means in contemporary Russia. Is it only a notation in one's passport? How important is belonging to an ethno-national group, and in what respects is it linguistic identity? How do these factors change while immigrants live in Finland? How do family members without an ethno-national Finnish background adapt?

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***Kaija Heikkinen. The ethnic movements of the finno-ugrian people in Russia – their reflections on the ethno-national situation in Finland.***

*The article elaborates the new multi-ethnic situation, when an increasing number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union is moving to Finland and other western countries. Finland was until recently described as an ethnographically homogeneous and monocultural country. From the early 1980s through the late 1990s the number of foreigners increased from 12.000 to 85.000; this represents about 1.5 % of the Finnish population. The collapse of the former Soviet Union and the end of the cold war has opened state borders. One consequence is increasing emigration from the former Soviet Union. The biggest group of contemporary immigrants in Finland consists of Russian-speakers. In Finland there were in 2000 according to the statistics about 32 000 citizens of the former Soviet Union. They can be divided into several subcategories. The largest group composed of Russian Finns, their spouses, and a smaller amount of migrant workers.*

*The article discusses the meaning, function and possible effects on emigration of numerous ethno-cultural organizations in Russia, including Finno-Ugrian ones.*